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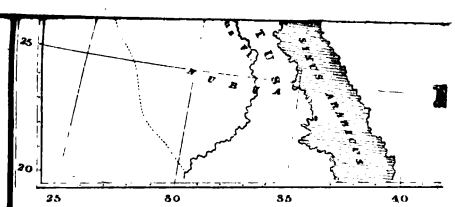
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THE

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AND

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and that "It is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts," Jer. ii. 19. The events recorded in the narratives of Scripture bear witness to the principles inculcated in the word of God. Some men may say they do not believe that similar results are now to be expected from the like proceedings; but the whole testimony of history, both concerning the Jews and other people, shows that, sooner or later, every nation has eventually suffered that just retribution for which its sins have called. Would that this important truth were duly impressed upon the minds of the rulers, and of the people, of every nation upon the earth!

The desolate state of Judea, and the afflicted condition of the Jews, after the destruction of Jerusalem, are powerfully described by the prophet Jeremiah, in his Lamentations, ch. i. 1—5.

How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people!
How is she become as a widow, she that was great among the nations!
And princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary!
She weepeth sore in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks:
Among all her lovers she hath none to comfort her:
All her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they are become her enemies.
Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction, and because of great servitude:
She dwelleth among the heathen, she findeth no rest:
All her persecutors overtook her between the straits.
The ways of Zion do mourn, because none come to the solemn feasts:
All her gates are desolate: her priests sigh,
Her virgins are afflicted, and she is in bitterness.
Her adversaries are the chief, her enemies prosper;
For the Lord hath afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions:
Her children are gone into captivity before the enemy.

The prophet had previously given warning of the judgments coming upon the people; see Jer. xxx. xxxi.

All faces were turned to paleness.
Alas! for that day is great,
So that none is like it:
It is even the time of Jacob's trouble.

But with the declaration and warning thus given of the extremity of suffering to be inflicted on the Jewish nation in the day of its captivity, promises of future deliverance and glory were given. The cause of the judgments was fully stated; also the extent to which they should go, and the manner in which they should be restrained, and that the Lord would not forsake his favoured people, even in their most severe sufferings, Jer. xxx. 11, and xxxi. 1—3.

For I am with thee, saith the Lord, to save thee:
Though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee:
Yet will I not make a full end of thee:
But I will correct thee in measure,
And will not leave thee altogether unpunished.
At the same time, saith the Lord,
Will I be the God of all the families of Israel,
And they shall be my people.
Thus saith the Lord,
The people which were left of the sword found grace in the wilderness;
Even Israel, when I went to cause him to rest.
The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying,
Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love:
Therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.

By a beautiful personification Rachel is represented as rising from her grave at Ephrata, weeping for her children led into captivity, and refusing to be comforted; but yet a word of comfort is sent.

Thus saith the Lord;
Refrain thy voice from weeping,
And thine eyes from tears:
For thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord;
And they shall come again from the land of the enemy.

And there is hope in their end, saith the Lord,
That thy children shall come again to their own border.

Here, as in other prophecies, the inspired seer is carried forward from the objects immediately before him, to others more distant and yet to come. The sufferings of the captivity at Babylon are blended with the greater sufferings of the dispersion by the Romans, and the return from the land of Shinar is lost sight of, in the latter day glory of the house of Israel; by this alone can the decided and emphatic language of chap. xxxi. 31—40, be fully realized. As yet it cannot be said of the Jews, that they all know the Lord, that their sin is remembered no more, and that the city is built unto the Lord, so that it shall not be plucked up, nor thrown down any more for ever. But it is not for us to anticipate when, and in what manner, these prophetic revelations will be brought to pass.

The Jews in captivity, after the destruction of Jerusalem, were chiefly to be found in Assyria, especially in Babylon, the capital of that land. To this country the captives from Judah had principally been led in three transportations. The first was in the third year of Jehoiakim, when Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem, and carried to Babylon many of the vessels and ornaments of the temple, with some of the people and of the nobles; among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, princes of the royal family. This was B.C. 605. It was rather the carrying away of selected prisoners and articles of value, than the breaking up of the nation. The temple still towered above its courts, the walls of Jerusalem were not thrown down, nor its palaces burned with fire. The exiles, as they cast a last, longing look at their once loved homes, still beheld the city of their God, in the mountain of his holiness, beautiful for situation.

The Jewish nation continued to despise the warnings of the Most High; the extent to which they carried their idolatrous practices is declared, Jer. xi. 13.

For according to the number of thy cities
Were thy gods, O Judah;
And according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem
Have ye set up altars to that shameful thing,
Even altars to burn incense unto Baal.

A darker hour speedily came. In the year B.C. 597, Nebuchadnezzar again invaded Judea, dethroned Jehoiachin, the son of Jehoiakim, and made his uncle Zedekiah king in his stead. A large number of captives were then removed, to weaken the rebellious land. These were the nobles, the military, and the artificers, more than seventeen thousand in number. Many of them were carried beyond Babylon, and placed in different parts of Mesopotamia. The prophet Ezekiel was one of these captives.

The Jewish nation did not yet learn wisdom from past experience. Zedekiah revolted against the Assyrians, and joined the Egyptians. This led to the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, B.C. 586; when, after a terrific slaughter, most of the remaining inhabitants of the land were cleared away. A few of the poor of the people were left in the land, to be vine-dressers and husbandmen, 2 Kings xxv. 12; Jer. xxxix. 10. There were also some bands of armed fugitives dispersed through the country, "forces which were in the fields," Jer. xl. 7—13; xli. 11. Many of them perished by each others' hands, as is related by Jeremiah; this is noticed in "*The Kings of Israel and Judah.*" Most of the survivors retired into Egypt, where they perished, while others fled into the adjacent countries. The mass of the sinful people, so constantly rebuked by the prophets, thus disappeared from Palestine. The invading troops no longer occupied the land; they had indeed cut closely, according to the prophecy uttered by Isaiah nearly two hundred years before, which was now fulfilled. Isa. vii. 20—25.

In the same day shall the Lord shave with a razor that is hired,
Namely, by them beyond the river, by the king of Assyria,

The head, and the hair of the feet:
And it shall also consume the beard.
And it shall come to pass in that day,
That a man shall nourish a young cow, and two sheep;
And it shall come to pass,
For the abundance of milk that they shall give he shall eat butter:
For butter and honey shall every one eat
That is left in the land.
And it shall come to pass in that day,
That every place shall be,
Where there were a thousand vines at a thousand silverlings,
It shall even be for briers and thorns.
With arrows and with bows shall men come thither;
Because all the land shall become briers and thorns.
And on all hills that shall be digged with the mattock,
There shall not come thither the fear of briers and thorns:
But it shall be for the sending forth of oxen,
And for the treading of lesser cattle.

This passage describes the wild state of the fertile land once so fully cultivated. Large tracts, formerly occupied as vineyards, rented after the rate of a piece of silver for each vine, were overgrown with thorns and briers. The thinly scattered inhabitants no longer went forth with the implements of husbandry; but carried bows and arrows to destroy the wild animals that lurked in the underwood and bushes. Gardens and fields were no longer fenced; the produce was not regularly carried to the store-house or the byre; but the few kine and sheep belonging to the poor occupiers, were left to enjoy the full benefit of an abundant though spontaneous pasturage. A cow in the East produces only a quart or two of milk in the day; but then, from the ample supply of food, it would freely give an unusual quantity of milk, with the rich cream or butter, the delicacy of eastern countries. In former days, the poor tenant of the soil rarely tasted this delicacy; now he might freely enjoy it. But could he do so, if, as one of the chosen people of God, he thought of his nation humbled, and her glories departed? Could he do so; when, although he ranged at will over the district

once cultivated for princes, whose families were now captives in a foreign land, he had no security for his life or scanty hoard? Both were at the disposal of any predatory band that might rove near his dwelling. And if disposed to exert himself, he could neither sell the fruits of his labour, nor hope to enjoy them in security. If not plundered by the robber, the collector and officers of his foreign master were at hand to take his property under the name of tribute; whatever portions might reach the treasury, the unhappy peasant was sure to lose all of which he could be deprived. The poor of a civilized land may be ground beneath the undue requirements of those above them; but let all who act thus remember, "He that oppresseth the poor, reproacheth his Maker. He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth. Whoso stoppeth his ears to the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard." Yet when there is no regularly organized state of society, no protection of law or justice, there the poor suffer still more severely; there is no security or real comfort to be enjoyed by any rank. Though the highest may first be removed, or cast down by the storm, yet when a deluge of suffering is poured out upon a land, as upon Judea, "all faces shall gather blackness," even the poorest must lose his little all; the sweeping torrent carries all away.

In this wild and solitary state, the land was left to enjoy her sabbaths, till the number of the sabbatical years in which the land had been tilled and sown, contrary to the Divine command, had been compensated for. Moses had denounced this judgment, Lev. xxvi. 34, and Jeremiah declared it was come to pass, 2 Chron. xxxvi. 21.

And if the words of the apostle, Rom. viii. 20—25, describing the whole creation as groaning and travailing in pain for the sin of man, are applied to inanimate nature, we may figure to ourselves the land of Judea rejoicing at being emptied of that wretched race of heaven-defying idolators, who lately had cumbered the

ground. The uncultivated state in which Judea was suffered to remain during the captivity, and the facility with which those who returned from Babylon re-occupied the possessions of their forefathers, plainly show that the land was left vacant; not colonized by heathens, as Samaria had been, nor occupied by an increase arising from the scanty remnant left by the conquerors. It is remarkable, that the counsels of Nebuchadnezzar should thus be overruled, so that he acted contrary to his obvious policy; but thus, and thus only, could the express denunciations by the prophets be fulfilled. The ten tribes were not to return to their possessions; a heathen colony was therefore permitted to settle therein. The tribes of Judah and Benjamin were again to occupy Jerusalem and the land of their fathers, therefore that country was reserved for them, there was no opposition to their return, they all could "dwell in their cities" without difficulty from their being possessed by others, Ezra ii. 70.

CHAPTER II.

THE CAPTIVE JEWS—ANCIENT BABYLON.

THE captive Jews who were carried to Babylon now claim attention. In the latter captivities, especially the last, the prisoners would most feel the bitterness of their lot. To be subjected to the lot of a prisoner of war is painful any where, but more so in the East than among European nations. This has been fully described by modern writers. The captives are stripped, or nearly so, of their apparel, and urged forward by force. They are also often bound in painful postures; the monuments of Egypt and sculptures of Persia give some striking representations of this. Those least accustomed to privations and fatigue, or of feeble constitutions, speedily sink under their sufferings; they are left to perish by the way, unless life is ended by the weapons of their guards. The statement, 2 Chron. xxviii. 15, respecting the captives of Judea, set free at the word of the prophet Oded, shows the state to which they were reduced in the short removal to Samaria; "And the men which were expressed by name rose up, and took the captives, and with the spoil clothed all that were naked among them, and arrayed them, and shod them, and gave them to eat and to drink, and anointed them, and carried all the feeble of them upon asses, and brought them to Jericho, the city of palm trees, to their brethren."

From Jer. xl. 1, we learn that the prisoners were collected at Ramah in Benjamin; some were slaughtered, the rest were fettered before the journey to Babylon commenced. To this gathering together of the prisoners, and their sad fate, the same prophet seems to refer in the passage already quoted, ch. xxxi. 15, when

he says, "A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping." By that beautiful and figurative description, Rachel, the mother of Benjamin, is represented as weeping for her children.

A voice comes from Ramah, a voice of despair,
For death's gloomy angel is triumphing there;
The children of beauty his arrows have smote,
And Rachel is weeping for hers that are not.

Alas for the parent whose hope and whose trust
Are withered and broken, and hid in the dust!
Where the blossom of summer all lovely appears;
But the dew-drops of evening are mingled with tears.

A voice comes from Ramah, a voice of dismay,
But the words of Jehovah can soothe it away:
They tell of a region where grief is forgot,
And Rachel is solac'd for those that are not.

The engraving on page 11, is copied from a sculpture on the face of a mountain in Media. Sir Robert Kerr Porter considers that it was expressly intended to commemorate the captivity of Israel; but it may rather be considered to represent the general treatment of eastern captives: they are here delineated as being brought into the presence of an eastern ruler, who is trampling under his feet the leader of his captive enemies. In this view, it may be considered as illustrating the removal of the Jewish prisoners to Babylon.

Even if some arrangements, more kind and better regulated than common, were made for the removal of the Jews to Babylon, still the length of the way, the extent of desert and mountain they had to pass, would render their trials severe. Doubtless many perished, while the recollection of past enjoyments, and the remembrance of the possessions of which they were deprived, with the painful anticipation of unknown trials awaiting their arrival, would add much to their sufferings.

EASTERN CAPTIVES.

The survivors were principally located at Babylon, then the capital of the empire, lately occupied as the metropolitan city by Nebuchadnezzar, who was exerting himself to render it unrivalled for extent and magnificence. The captive Jews were designed by him to add to the population of this vast city, as yet thinly inhabited in proportion to its extent. Those who arrived there were settled as colonists rather than as captives, although, as presently will appear, they had many trials to endure; and from Nehemiah v. 8, who speaks of having had to redeem his brethren that were sold to the heathen, it is evident that a part, at least, were actually slaves in the land of their captivity. They must have been deeply affected by the appearances around them; the broad plains of Chaldea, unvaried by hill and dale, intersected by straight lines of canals, bordered by willows, widely differed from the varied surface of their own beloved land, with its cultivated hill sides, sunny slopes, and shady valleys. Nor was the aspect of the city of Babylon less strange and unpleasing, to those who remembered the rocky heights and romantic situation of their beloved Zion. With all its splendour, Babylon was not Jerusalem. There can be no agreement, no comparison between the temple of God and idols; this is true now in a spiritual sense, even as it was of old in the literal meaning of the words.

At the time when the Jews were thus led into captivity, the two powers ruling over the then known world, were the Babylonians and the Medes. The dominion of the latter was over the countries east of the river Tigris; the former had succeeded to the Assyrians, and had become identified with that monarchy, extending their conquests westward, substituting Babylon as the capital of this enlarged empire, in place of Nineveh, which was captured by the united forces of the Babylonians and the Medes, B.C. 608, under circumstances minutely predicted by the prophet Nahum. Of that vast city no certain traces are known; some

grassy mounds, among which a few ancient remains have been found, are supposed to mark its site.

Babylon was situated in a plain, upon the banks of the river Euphrates. Much has been written descriptive of its glory and riches: these accounts evidently are for the most part exaggerated; a brief summary will here be given of the particulars most worthy of credit. The first mention of Babylon is in the earliest of authentic histories, the sacred Scriptures. It is in Gen. xi. 1—9, where we read of the building of the tower of Babel, the impious designs of the children of men, the confusion of tongues, and the dispersion of mankind by the miraculous interposition of the Most High. In the next chapter, Babel is mentioned among the cities of Nimrod. No particulars are given respecting this place; it is only noticed on account of the violence and iniquity of its rulers and inhabitants: but all the details are passed by in silence, for though they might be glorious in the sight of men, they had no direct reference to the history of the people of God. In the book of Daniel are a few incidental notices respecting this city, which show that it was much beautified by Nebuchadnezzar during the period when the Jews were captives there.

The earliest minute account of Babylon is given by Herodotus, a Greek, who is the first authentic uninspired historian. He visited this vast city, about B.C. 450, sixty years after the Jews had returned to their own land. He describes Babylon as situated in a plain level country, being four square, one hundred and twenty stadia on each side, or four hundred and eighty in circumference. The length of the stadium here intended is uncertain, it may have been about six hundred and thirty feet, or not more than five hundred. Without taking the largest measure, it may be supposed that Babylon was twelve miles each way. It was surrounded by a deep and wide trench, or ditch, filled with water from the Euphrates, within which was a lofty wall, about seventy-five feet wide, and

said to be three hundred feet in height. This was constructed of masses of earth, burned in furnaces, so as to form a sort of brick, secured by layers of reeds and bitumen, which was found in large quantities in that country. On the walls were towers and small erections, with open spaces sufficiently large for a four-horsed chariot to turn. Within the enclosure were many large openings, gardens, and fields. The space within has been called a walled province, it was equal in size to a small English county, such as Middlesex, while its population was not so great as that of London and the neighbourhood, which occupy a much smaller extent of ground.

Babylon was divided into two parts by the river Euphrates, or rather it was built on each bank of that river. These divisions communicated by a bridge, not built wholly with brick, but consisting of several piers raised from the bed of the river, on which were laid planks, so as to form a road; a part of it was withdrawn at night, to cut off the communication. The banks were secured by walls of brick, with two-leaved brazen gates, opening from the river to the ends of streets, which intersected others at right angles. In these streets were many large houses, some three or four stories in height; but the greater part of the habitations were small miserable huts, such as abound in every eastern city.

Each division of the city had a large walled enclosure. One was a fortified palace with large gardens: the other was the temple of Belus; supposed by many to have been raised on the site of the tower of Babel. It was a vast pile, consisting of eight stories or towers, one upon another, to the height of four hundred feet. An ascent, with resting places, wound around the sides to the summit, where was a temple richly adorned, in which the priests performed idolatrous rites of imposture and delusion. At the base of the tower was another temple, once remarkable for a golden image.

Diodorus Siculus, another ancient writer, describes a palace at each end of the bridge, having also a private communication by a sub-way, or tunnel, beneath the bed of the river. Ancient writers speak much of the hanging gardens of the palace, describing them among the principal wonders of the world. These were erected on a square of three or four acres. Walls, or piers of brick, were raised so as to support terraces of different heights, the most lofty being about seventy-five feet above the level of the plain. The arches, or piers which formed these terraces, were covered with bitumen and sheets of lead, upon which was a sufficient depth of earth to allow even large shrubs and trees to be planted. These gardens were watered by a machine which raised water from the river. Vast labour and expense would be incurred to enable art thus to overcome nature; but the hanging gardens of Babylon must have been poor, when compared with the pleasure gardens of Solomon, situated among the diversified heights of Lebanon. Nebuchadnezzar is said to have constructed these gardens to please his queen, a native of Media, with a representation of the hills and valleys of her own land, even on the plains of Babylonia. "Great princes have great playthings," and certainly works such as these, are very preferable to the savage delights of war. The largest palace enclosed a tract of eight miles in circumference, in which were these hanging gardens and terraces.

The wide open spaces within the walls of Babylon, not occupied by houses, were cultivated gardens, and even corn fields; they would afford a considerable supply of food to the inhabitants. Large embankments protected the buildings from the effects of inundations, which also were drawn off by canals and reservoirs.

The inhabitants of this splendid city, at the period when the Jews were captives in the land, were conquerors of the civilized world. Their country produced abundantly, especially corn; Herodotus describes it as commonly yielding two hundred fold, and sometimes

WATERING AN EASTERN GARDEN BY CANALS.

three hundred fold, the ears both of wheat and barley being four fingers in breadth. The land, as in Egypt, was irrigated by canals, with trenches supplying water through the fields. The manner in which these small streams are ultimately distributed, is represented in the engraving on page 16; the channels of the small streams are opened or closed by the foot, so as to direct the water to the different parts of the garden in succession. This is the watering by the foot mentioned Deut. xi. 10, and elsewhere in the Bible. The fig, the vine, and the olive, were not cultivated, but the palm trees were abundant; these were useful for food and clothing, and even produced a sort of wine, in addition to the use that might be made of the wood.

The situation of Babylon was very favourable for extensive commerce. Connected on the one hand with the Persian Gulf opening into the Indian Ocean, on the other with the Caspian and Euxine Seas, it was the central mart for all the nations of the civilized world. Here were brought into communication the inhabitants of the frozen north, and the dwellers on the shore of the Mediterranean, with the varied tribes of India, and those of the eastern extremities of Asia. The business of this vast and central mart collected persons from various parts of the globe; some were drawn thither to see its vast magnificence; some from a desire to partake in its licentiousness, which, from common historians as well as the pages of sacred writ, is shown to have been excessive. In some respects, the licentious proceedings were carried to most awful lengths.

Babylon was also famed for its learning. The wide and open expanse of the unbroken horizon of the broad plain of Chaldea, with its unclouded sky and clear atmosphere, gave peculiar facilities for observing the heavenly bodies. The habitual observation of these luminaries early led to discoveries in astronomy; when one science is cultivated, and the mental powers

are enlarged, others speedily receive attention: Babylon thus became known as the abode of science. Philosophers and learned men resorted thither from other countries; the learning of the Chaldees was celebrated, even as that of Egypt had been at an earlier period; but this learning degenerated into folly and superstition. There is frequent mention in Scripture of the magicians and astrologers of Babylon. Astronomy was cultivated chiefly with a view to pry into futurity. The extent and folly of this falsely called learning is stated by the prophet Isaiah, xlvii. 11—13.

Therefore shall evil come upon thee;
Thou shalt not know from whence it riseth:
And mischief shall fall upon thee;
Thou shalt not be able to put it off:
And desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, which thou shalt not know.
Stand now with thine enchantments,
And with the multitude of thy sorceries,
Wherein thou hast laboured from thy youth;
If so be thou shalt be able to profit,
If so be thou mayest prevail.
Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels.
Let now the astrologers, the stargazers,
The monthly prognosticators,
Stand up, and save thee
From these things that shall come upon thee.

In a subsequent chapter, we shall notice the present state of Babylon, or rather of its ruins now to be traced.

An eastern monarch.

CHAPTER III.

THE JEWS AT BABYLON—PROPHECIES OF JEREMIAH—DANIEL, AND HIS COMPANIONS.

It was the earnest desire of Nebuchadnezzar to render the vast city of Babylon magnificent and populous. He was therefore disposed to treat the captive Jews rather as colonists than as slaves, which rendered their situation favourable in some respects. Of this

they were commanded to avail themselves with thankfulness. It was better than the treatment experienced by their brethren of Israel in Assyria, recorded by Tobit, who relates the secrecy with which he was compelled to act, when burying one of his captive countrymen who had been wantonly murdered in the city where he dwelt. God also gave some among them such favour in the sight of the Chaldeans, that they were appointed to situations of trust and importance.

About the middle of the captivity, Jehoiachin, who reigned in Judah before Zedekiah, was liberated and allowed to take his place among other kings, then detained at Babylon as hostages, or resorting thither to pay homage. The Jews had rulers among themselves, one of their royal family had the title of Prince of the Captivity. From the words of Jeremiah, xxxiv. 5, it appears that when Zedekiah died, the Jews were allowed to inter his remains in an honourable manner, according to their own customs. Josephus states this was done by Nebuchadnezzar; he probably supplied the means for rendering these honours. Still their situation was painful, and deeply humiliating in many respects. Accustomed to consider themselves as the favoured people of the Most High, they could not without pain reflect upon their situation, humbled, and subjected to strangers in a foreign land. Those among them who were really influenced by pious feelings, were deeply grieved to behold idolatry every where prevalent, and the idols considered as conquerors over the only living and true God. They might not be exposed to the same cruel sufferings as the early Israelitish captives already mentioned; but they were subjected to the scoffs of the heathen, and taunted for their peculiar faith. The painful state of feeling thus excited, is strongly expressed in the first portion of the 137th Psalm.

Along the banks where Babel's current flows,
  Our captive bands in deep despondence stray'd,
While Zion's fall in sad remembrance rose,
  Her friends, her children, mingled with the dead.

The tuneless harp, that once with joy we strung,
  When praise employed and mirth inspired the lay,
In mournful silence on the willows hung,
  And growing grief prolong'd the tedious day.

Our hard oppressors, to increase our woe,
  With taunting smiles a song of Zion claim;
Bid sacred praise in strains melodious flow,
  While they blaspheme the great Jehovah's name.

But how, in heathen chains, and lands unknown,
  Shall Israel's sons a song of Zion raise?
O hapless Salem, God's terrestrial throne,
  Thou land of glory, sacred mount of praise;

If e'er my memory lose thy lovely name,
  If my cold heart neglect my kindred race,
Let dire destruction seize this guilty frame;
  My hand shall perish, and my voice shall cease.

There is no connected account of the events which took place among the Jews during their captivity in Babylon, but the historic and other notices in the sacred books, supply sufficient details to enable us to take a general view of the subject, with a few additional particulars; these, with the events which followed the return of the Jews to their own land, form the subject of the present volume.

We are thus led back to the beginning of the captivity, which was some years before the destruction of Jerusalem. It had been repeatedly foretold by the prophets, and its continuance for seventy years was stated by Jeremiah, ch. xxv. 11; xxix. 10.

And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.
  For thus saith the Lord,
That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon
I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you,
In causing you to return to this place.

This period is to be dated from the third year of Jehoiakim, B.C. 605, when, as already mentioned, the first party of nobles and useful artificers were removed to Babylon. The duration of the captivity was also

stated by Jeremiah, in a letter which he sent to the captives in Babylon, soon after the second division had been carried thither, B.C. 597. The Jews in that city were unsettled in their minds, some false prophets having promised a speedy return to their own land. In a vision, recorded Jeremiah xxiv., the prophet saw the representation of two baskets of figs; one contained good, the other bad fruit. He was told that the good figs represented the captives then in Chaldea, who would be brought back to Judea, who should be the Lord's people, and he would be their God; while the bad figs represented the Jews then remaining in Judea, upon whom the sword, the famine, and pestilence should be sent, till they were consumed from off the land given to their fathers. In this letter the captives were directed to set their minds at rest; and the counsels given show that they were treated as colonists. They were especially directed to seek the peace of the city whither they were carried captive.

Many of the Jews were not disposed to believe the communication sent by the prophet. They caused Shemaiah to write to Zephaniah, the Sagan or second high priest at Jerusalem, complaining of what Jeremiah had written. Upon this a severe judgment to come upon Shemaiah was denounced, also upon the false prophets. It appears that Nebuchadnezzar, finding that these deceivers had kept the Jews in an unsettled state, caused Zedekiah and Ahab, two of their number, to be burned; see Jer. xxix. 22.

Another written communication from Jeremiah to the Jews at Babylon is recorded. In the fourth year of Zedekiah, that monarch proceeded from Jerusalem to Babylon, apparently to pay tribute, and to do homage, accompanied by Seraiah, when the latter was charged with a book or roll containing the prophecy against Babylon, which is written in Jeremiah l. and li., where, in most powerful and animated language, the prophet foretells the destruction about to come upon Babylon. This prophecy was fulfilled to the letter; the fulfilment is witnessed at the present day by those

who visit the desolate heaps, which are all that now remain of "Sheshach, the praise of the whole earth," but in which no living soul now remains: it is desolate for ever.

This, and other written records of prophecy, show that even in that day the warnings and consolations of the prophets were delivered in writing, as well as by word of mouth. That was the appointed course in ancient times; but since the invention of printing, the written message goes forth with vastly increased power. In addition to the Bible records, many thousands have been impressed by the written and printed words of God's messengers, who never could have known those truths, had they only gone forth as spoken and swiftly passing words, uttered by the lips. Leighton and Baxter were very highly gifted, and especially blessed by the numbers converted under their ministrations when preaching by the voice; but have they not been still more blessed as preaching by the pen, and the press? Let us then recognize the hand of God in every appointed means of usefulness, and seek to avail ourselves thereof, without limiting his power, or giving undue preference to any one means which he is pleased to bless, or exalting it at the expense of another.

Seraiah was directed to read the book at Babylon. There was not at that time any printing press by which copies might be multiplied, so that in a few hours the whole message could be conveyed to every abode of a captive Jew, for his deliberate perusal and serious reflection. When the words of the prophecy had been made known, Seraiah was to bind the book to a stone, and cast it into the midst of the Euphrates, that its disappearance might be a sign of the destruction about to come upon that proud city. "Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise from the evil that I (the Lord) will bring upon her." The glowing language of this remarkable prophecy carries us forward to the destruction of the New Testament Babylon, predicted in the Apocalypse, Rev. xviii. There we read of a mighty

angel casting a stone, like a great millstone, into the sea, saying, "Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all." These awe-inspiring portions of holy writ call our attention to the fatal system of popery by which the bodies and souls of men have been so long enslaved. Remember the awful invitation, "Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her." Mark one cause assigned; "And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth."

In following the history of the captive Jews, our attention may be first directed to Daniel and his companions. When taken to Babylon, they were youths, probably about eighteen years of age. Nebuchadnezzar ordered that they should be instructed for three years in the Chaldee language and learning, to qualify them for official duties in the court of Babylon; thus fulfilling to the letter the prophecy by Isaiah to Hezekiah, respecting the descendants of that monarch; "Of thy sons shall they take away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon," Isa. xxxix. 7. It was intended they should be brought up so that they should forget their father's land, and their father's God. The names of these four Jewish youths were therefore changed to Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, heathen appellations instead of names, all of which had a reference to their Lord, the true God. They were to be habituated to the heathen customs, their sustenance was to be regularly supplied from the provision made for the royal household. This would be in some measure connected with offerings to idols; it would include food forbidden to the Jews, regarded as defiled by those who strictly observed the law as given by Moses.

Daniel and his companions were influenced by the fear of Jehovah; they refused to partake of the food thus provided for them, though well suited to gratify the sensual appetite. They desired that they might

have vegetable food and water only, instead of the luxurious costly diet and wine offered to them. Melzar, the superintendent, hesitated lest their health should suffer from their spare diet, so as to cause him to be blamed; but, after a short trial, their health was found improving instead of suffering by the change. The Hebrew youths were then permitted to use the diet they preferred; they were not negligent as to the studies they were directed to pursue, but were enabled to make such progress as to surpass the learned Chaldeans themselves. It is expressly recorded, that their "countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat," though the superintendent had feared the contrary. We know that "favour is deceitful and beauty is vain," Prov. xxxi. 30, when valued for itself or for worldly purposes; yet still, like every earthly endowment, it may be, as it was in this case, caused to promote God's work. There is, however, much need for watchfulness and prayer; for beauty often ensnares both the possessors and those attracted thereby.

The history of Daniel and his companions is very instructive to young persons. It shows the vast importance of avoiding sinful compliances, and of being careful not to partake of the sins of those around us. We also may learn the great advantages to be derived from being indifferent to the pleasures of appetite and sense. A moderate diet is ever found best to strengthen for labour, whether of the mind or of the body; but thousands upon thousands destroy themselves, both soul and body, by indulging their appetites: even in this life, temperance brings a great reward. From these particulars, we may observe how especially the hand of God was marked, in the promotion of the Jews who were first selected to fill offices in the land of their conquerors. From Daniel to Nehemiah, they were all servants of Jehovah, men of piety and devoted spirit.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PROPHET EZEKIEL.

We now proceed to notice another prophet among the captives. Ezekiel, the son of Buzi, was of the order of the priests; he was carried away from Judea B.C. 597. He was not left at Babylon, but was removed with others to some place in Mesopotamia, situated on the river Chebar or Khaibour, which joins the Euphrates, about two hundred miles to the north-west of Babylon. No particulars are recorded as to the treatment of this division of the captives; they seem to have enjoyed a degree of liberty similar to that of their brethren in Chaldea. Here Ezekiel was favoured with Divine visions and prophetic revelations, which began in the fifth year of Jehoiachin's captivity, when the prophet was about thirty years of age. The last date recorded is the twenty-seventh year, consequently Ezekiel prophesied during twenty-two years; thus, even in that remote district, the Lord cared for the captives of Israel, sending to them the messages of his word.

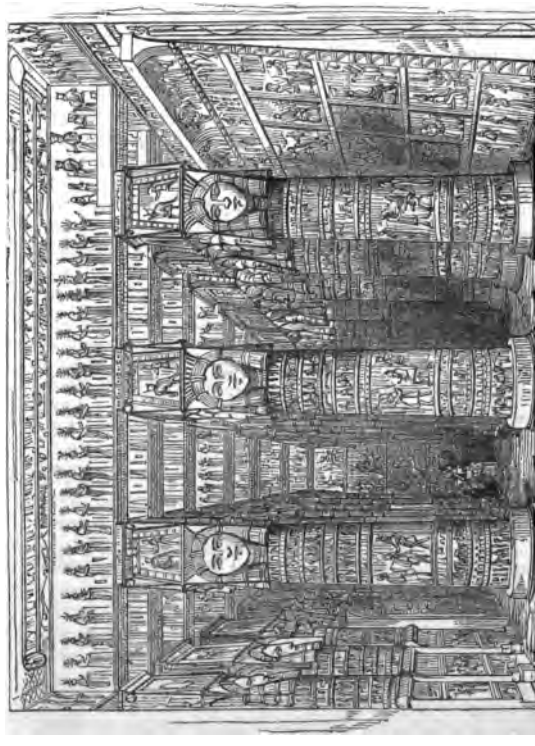
The opening vision is recorded in Ezek. i. It was a magnificent display of the Divine majesty, attributes, and perfections. A glimpse of the Divine glory was given, and of the mysterious dealings of Providence; also of the cherubim, whose appearance denoted the manner in which the angels are sent forth as ministering spirits. It is shown that the Lord doeth all things in wisdom, truth, and justice; but the depths of his counsels, and the mystery of his operations, are far beyond human power to discern. The intricacy of the movements of Divine Providence, with the regularity and certainty of these motions, are beautifully

pointed out by the emblematic representation of wheels in the middle of wheels, full of eyes, and so lofty that "they were dreadful;" their vast size and irresistible force filling the beholder with awe.

The prophet was commissioned to declare the Divine words to the rebellious house of Israel. He was to impress them with a deep and full sense of their guilt, but to show the way of peace to which they might yet have recourse. The message was one of lamentations, mourning, and woe. And though unwilling to hear the counsels which were for their peace, the prophet was to go to them and tell them, "Thus saith the Lord God; whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear." He was to be as a watchman to the house of Israel, to warn both the righteous and the wicked.

The prophet Ezekiel was directed to attract the attention of those about him by symbolical actions. In Ezek. iv. is recorded how the approach of the siege of Jerusalem was set forth by a mimic attack upon a city, portrayed on one of the large flat bricks of Chaldea. The prophet himself was to lie upon his side in a horizontal position, representing the besiegers, while by his food and privations he represented the sufferings of the inhabitants. By shaving off his hair, and scattering it to the winds, ch. v., was denoted the judgments about to be executed, with the general dispersion of the Jews. The desolations were expressly detailed, stating both the cause and the suffering. See particularly ch. vi. 11—14; also the lot of the survivors, vii. 16—19.

In the following year, while the prophet sat in the house, with the elders of the captives around him, probably listening to the preached word, he again felt the influence of Divine prophetic power. In a remarkable vision, the idolatries then practised at Jerusalem were presented to his mental view. These combined the abominations of the Egyptians, Phenicians, and Persians, and all seem to have been secretly practised



A chamber of imagery. Interior of the portico of the temple at Dandersh in Egypt.

within the sacred precincts, though on a smaller scale than in the heathen temples. The denunciation of wrath follows at ch. viii. 17, 18. And has not the professed Christian cause to look within and tremble?

What if within his world, his church, our Lord
  Have entered thee, as in some temple gate,
Where, looking round, each glance might thee afford
  Some glorious earnest of thy high estate,
And thou, false heart and frail, hast turn'd from all,
To worship pleasure's shadow on the wall?

If, when the Lord of glory was in sight,
  Thou turn thy back upon that fountain clear,
To bow before the little drop of light,
  Which dim-eyed men call praise and glory here;
What dost thou, but adore the sun, and scorn
Him at whose only word both sun and stars were born?

If, while around thee gales from Eden breathe,
  Thou hide thine eyes, to make thy peevish moan
Over some broken reed of earth beneath,
  Some darling of blind fancy dead and gone,
As wisely might thou in Jehovah's fane
Offer thy love and tears to Thammuz slain.

Thou who hast deign'd the Christian's heart to call
  Thy church and shrine; whene'er our rebel will
Would in that chosen home of thine instal
  Belial or Mammon, grant us not the ill
We blindly ask; in very love refuse
Whate'er thou know'st our weakness would abuse.

Or rather teach us, Lord, to choose the good,
  To pray for nought, to seek to none but Thee,
Nor by "our daily bread," mean common food,
  And say, "From this world's evil set us free;"
Teach us to love, in Christ, our sole true bliss,
Else, though in Christ's own words, we surely pray amiss.

In ch. ix. we find a further representation in vision, showing the preservation of those who yet feared the Lord, while the idolaters would be utterly destroyed. A mark was set upon the forehead of the few who cried and sighed for the abominations of the land.

Then followed a representation of the Shechinah, or Divine glory, departing first from the temple, afterwards from the city. So vivid and minute was the representation of this vision, that the prophet was enabled to discern and recognize the very persons then giving wicked counsel at Jerusalem; he saw the sudden and awful death of Pelatiah, one of the number. He was also made acquainted with the counsels given by those adversaries of the truth.

The visions were continued, and the prophet was told to make other emblematical representations. He was commanded to prepare for removing his goods, a small possession, even as one going forth to captivity. He was to dig through the clay wall of his house, to represent the attempt of the Jewish king and his attendants to escape by night, which ended in his being led into captivity; while the mysterious declaration was given, that though Zedekiah should be brought to the land of the Chaldeans, he should not see it, pointing out the loss of his eyesight, 2 Kings xxv. 7. The people would turn away from these denunciations, therefore a special declaration was sent, ch. xii. 27, 28.

> Son of man, behold, they of the house of Israel say,
> The vision that he seeth is for many days to come,
> And he prophesieth of the times that are afar off.
> Therefore say unto them,
> Thus saith the Lord God;
> There shall none of my words be prolonged any more,
> But the word which I have spoken shall be done,
> Saith the Lord God.

This was followed by a solemn warning against the false prophets, see Ezek. xiii. It was confirmed by another message, to be delivered to the children of Israel while sitting before the prophet, which extends through ch. xiv. Here is an awful declaration concerning all those who draw near to the Lord, with their hearts occupied by their idols. To what multitudes in our worshipping congregations are these words applicable! Ch. xiv. 4, 5.

Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumbling-block of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet; I the Lord will answer him that cometh according to the multitude of his idols; that I may take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all estranged from me through their idols.

The day of pardon for Judah was then gone by. It was declared that the land had sinned so grievously, that even if Noah, Daniel, and Job had been in it, they should deliver none but themselves.

The word of the Lord then came in two parables, especially suited for the people to whom the prophet spake: one showed how useless was the barren vine; the other, in strong metaphorical language, delineated the wretched state into which the favoured people of Jehovah had brought themselves; Judah was thereby reminded of the sinful and the awful condition of Israel. Another emblematic parable follows. The judgments sent upon the royal family of Judah are represented, but the prophet is led onward, and favoured with a view of the restoration of Israel, affording a glimpse of the kingdom of the Messiah, ch. xvii. 22—24.

Thus saith the Lord God;
I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it;
I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one,
And I will plant it upon an high mountain, and eminent:
In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it:
And it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar:
And under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing;
In the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell.
And all the trees of the field shall know
That I the Lord have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree,
Have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish:
I the Lord have spoken and have done it.

In the next chapter, the Divine justice is vindicated; the unfounded murmurings of the Jews, that they were punished for their fathers' sins, are fully met. This portion of prophecy concludes with a lamentation for the princes of Israel and for Jerusalem. In the close there is a beautiful reference to Judah, under the figure of a vine, so frequently used for that purpose in holy writ.

These prophecies of Ezekiel were confirmed by the events then passing with respect to Jerusalem. They commanded attention. In the following year, the Jewish elders came to the prophet, expressly to inquire of the Lord. They were reminded in plain terms of the Divine mercies, and of the rebellions of Israel, especially in profaning the sabbaths; but a promise of future favour was given, with a touching declaration of their future repentance; a warning is also given—that now the sword of judgment was sharpened and furbished—that "it is the rod of my Son, it despiseth every tree," Ezek. xxi. 10, marginal reading. The lofty must come down.

There is a remarkable reference to the circumstance which would decide Nebuchadnezzar in his attack upon Jerusalem. In his march towards the western revolters, he would hesitate whether first to go against the Jewish metropolis, or against Rabbath of the Ammonites; he would decide by having recourse to a method of divination then frequently practised. The names of the cities were written on arrows, and that city would be first attacked the name of which was first drawn from the quiver. The sins of Jerusalem were again largely enumerated, and the utter depravity of its inhabitants forcibly described, ch. xxii. 24—31. The idolatries of Samaria and Jerusalem also were delineated in figurative terms, and the judgments to come upon them announced.

Another series of prophecies follow: these were delivered two years later, when Nebuchadnezzar be-

gan the siege of Jerusalem. The prophet, though so far distant from the scene of calamity, was made to know that the king of Babylon had set himself against Jerusalem that very day. He was told to describe the destruction of the city and its inhabitants, under a figure of a boiling pot, in which the best pieces of the choicest of the flock should be consumed. To impress the extent and overwhelming weight of this calamity the more strongly upon the Jews around him, the prophet, who was suddenly bereaved of his wife, was forbidden to mourn for his loss.

That two distinct courses of prophecy should be uttered about the same time, one by Jeremiah at Jerusalem, the other by Ezekiel in Mesopotamia, both referring to the same events, is very remarkable ; the more so, as in addition to the judgments upon Israel, those about to come upon Egypt, Tyre, and other nations, were made known to both prophets.

The Jews in captivity looked at this time for news from Judea with the deepest anxiety. Their hearts must have been weighed down with painful anticipations of the fate then coming upon their city. In Ezek. xxxiii. 21—33, we read of the news of the destruction of Jerusalem being received by that prophet, or perhaps of his first interview with one who had been present at the scene of horror. Ezekiel is not directed to say much in reference to this afflictive event, but is told to speak of the sure destruction that should come upon the scanty remnant in Judea, ver. 27—29. The prophet also has a word sent for the groups assembled under the shelter of the walls of the houses to converse, as still is usual in the East during the winter season. Their attention was engrossed by the intelligence from Jerusalem ; they desired to know more of the judgments of the Lord, but it was from curiosity, or for amusement, to pass the time ; not from a real desire for instruction or improvement, nor from any wish to be impressed by the awful

declarations uttered by Ezekiel. The passage contains a solemn warning, applicable to the mere professors of our day, which must not be omitted.

Also, thou son of man,
The children of thy people still are talking against thee
By the walls and in the doors of the houses,
And speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying,
Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word
That cometh forth from the Lord.
And they come unto thee, as the people cometh,
And they sit before thee as my people.
And they hear thy words, but they will not do them:
For with their mouth they show much love,
But their heart goeth after their covetousness.
And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song
Of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument:
For they hear thy words, but they do them not.
And when this cometh to pass, (lo, it will come,)
Then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them.

Although Jerusalem was now in ruins, and the Jewish people dispersed, Ezekiel was still set as a watchman to the house of Israel. He was admonished of his own duty, and directed to admonish others. The careless shepherds are warned, in ch. xxxiv., in language which should make every unfaithful pastor tremble. The prophet speaks to ministers of every age and church among professing Christians; painful indeed is it to reflect, to how many the description, ver. 3—6, has been applicable.

Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool,
Ye kill them that are fed—but ye feed not the flock.
The diseased have ye not strengthened,
Neither have ye healed that which was sick,
Neither have ye bound up that which was broken,
Neither have ye brought again that which was driven away,
Neither have ye sought that which was lost;
But with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them.
And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd:

And they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when
they were scattered.
My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon
every high hill:
Yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth,
And none did search or seek after them.

How similar to the language in which our blessed Lord reproved the like characters of the time when he appeared on earth. Of himself there is an express promise, ver. 23, 24, 29—31.

And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall
feed them,
Even my servant David;
He shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd.
And I the Lord will be their God,
And my servant David a prince among them;
I the Lord have spoken it.
And I will raise up for them a plant of renown,
And they shall be no more consumed with hunger in the
land,
Neither bear the shame of the heathen any more.
Thus shall they know that I the Lord their God am with
them,
And that they, even the house of Israel, are my people,
Saith the Lord God.
And ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men,
And I am your God, saith the Lord God.

A figurative description of the deliverance of Israel is given ch. xxxvi. An entire change of heart and spirit is especially promised, ver. 25—38. By the vision of the resurrection of dry bones, in ch. xxxvii., the conversion and restoration of the Jews are pointed out. This is also applicable to the Lord's raising his church from its depressed state, and should call to our minds the great and awful day of the general resurrection of the dead. Then follow the awful prophecies respecting Gog and Magog, and the destruction of the enemies of the Lord. These are generally considered to refer to events yet to come in the latter days, and are surrounded with darkness into which no one yet can penetrate.

There is no account of the death of this prophet; but a building is pointed out a few miles to the south-east of the ruins of Babylon, which is said to be the tomb of Ezekiel. It certainly has been regarded so for many ages, nor is the circumstance of his residing at Kaibar opposed thereto; he might have removed to Babylon, or have died when on a journey to that city. Benjamin of Tudela mentions this tomb in the twelfth century, and relates the great resort of the Jews thither yearly at the feast of expiation, when the book of the prophet was publicly read.

This hasty glance at the prophecies of Ezekiel, relating to his own people, may be closed with a brief mention of the remarkable vision of the second temple, Ezek. xl.—xlviii., justly considered one of the most difficult portions of the Bible.

These chapters evidently are connected with the last chapter of the book of Revelation. As yet all remains a mystery; but the time will come when these things shall be understood. Let us be thankful that all passages of Scripture which contain instruction needful for our salvation, are made plain now, and may be understood by the unlettered countryman as well, or better, than by those deeply versed in human sciences. Whether this vision is descriptive literally of a temple to be built, or figuratively gives a delineation of the gospel church, is the point most frequently under consideration; this still is enveloped in clouds and darkness. But let us not forget that there is much instruction in these chapters, applicable to every age. Let us desire to drink of the waters of life, and to partake of the fruit of the tree of life, which is for food, and of the leaves that are for medicine, encouraged by the gracious declarations in the book of Revelation, that the leaves are for the healing of the nations, and that the fruit is set forth in a constant supply. But especially let us remember the invitation; "And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

CHAPTER V.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S CONQUEST OF THE NATIONS AROUND PALESTINE.

AFTER the destruction of Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar proceeded to subjugate or destroy the nations around the land of Palestine. These operations were begun in the year following; they occupied this mighty conqueror several years. He is styled in Scripture "the rod of God's anger;" as such he was not only employed to punish the Jews, but also to inflict punishment upon those who had assisted in the downfal of the Jewish nation, to gratify their own envy and evil feelings toward the chosen people of the Lord. They rejoiced in the humbling of Judea, although some of them had encouraged the Jews to rebel against the Assyrians. In this work Nebuchadnezzar was "the servant of Jehovah;" he is expressly mentioned as such, Jer. xxv. 9, and elsewhere. These nations continued subject to the Babylonian government, till it was overthrown in its turn by Cyrus. That government lasted seventy years, calculating from the taking of Nineveh, B.C. 606, by the Babylonians and Medes, to the capture of Babylon by Cyrus, B.C. 606. That this servitude of the nations would last seventy years, was expressly declared, Jer. xxv. 11; xxix. 10; xxvii. 7; Isa. xxiii. 15. When that time was completed, they, as well as the Jews, were delivered from the oppression of the Chaldeans.

The prophecies relative to the subjugation of these nations may be enumerated. It will be a profitable exercise for the reader to turn to the passages.

The Tyrians, Isa. xxiii. 1—15; Jer. xxv. 22; Ezek. xxvi. 7—13; xxvii. 2—26.

The Sidonians, Jer. xxv. 22; xlvii. 4; Ezek. xxviii. 21—23.

The Philistines, Jer. xxv. 20; Ezek. xxv. 16; Zeph. ii. 5.

The Egyptians, Isa. xix. 4—23; Jer. xlvi. 3—26; Ezek. xxix. 2—12; xxx. 20—26; xxxii. 2—16; Joel iii. 19.

The Ethiopians, Isa. xviii. 1—7; Ezek. xxx. 4—11.

The Arabians, Jer. xxv. 24.

The Edomites, Amos i. 11, 12; Obed. 10—16; Jer. xlix. 17.

The Moabites, Ezek. xxv. 8—11; Jer. xxv. 21; xlviii. 40—47.

The Ammonites, Amos i. 13—15; Ezek. xxv. 4—10.

The Syrians, or Damascus, Amos i.; Jer. xlix.

Some particulars respecting a part of these nations may be gathered from common history, in addition to the above notices of them in Scripture. Tyre is one respecting which the fullest details are preserved. At that time Tyre was a very strong city, upon the coast of the Mediterranean, just at the northern extremity of Palestine. Its territory was small, but its wealth and power were great; for Tyre was at that time the centre of the trade of the known world, the general mart of commerce, and possessed a great number of ships. From Ezek. xxvii. we learn the particulars of its trade; they give interesting information respecting the chief productions of various countries, all of which were brought to this great emporium as a centre, from whence they were supplied to other lands. The following is Vincent's summary view.

"From Hermon, and the mountains in its neighbourhood, fir for planking; and from Libanus, cedars for masts.

"From Bashan, east of the sea of Galilee, oaks for oars.

"From Greece, or the Grecian isles, ivory to adorn

RUINS OF THE PORT OF TYRE.

the benches or the wastes of the galleys, and sumptuous buildings.

"From Egypt, linen ornamented with different colours, for sails or flags, or ensigns.

"From Peloponnesus, blue and purple cloths for awnings.

"From Sidon and Aradus, mariners: but Tyre itself furnished pilots and commanders.

"From Gebul or Biblos, on the coast beyond Tripolis and Berytus, calkers.

"From Persia and Africa, mercenary troops.

"From Aradus, the troops that garrisoned Tyre, with the Gammadim.

"From Tarshish, or by distant voyages towards the west, and towards the east, great wealth, iron, tin, lead, and silver. Tin implies Britain or Spain, or at least a voyage beyond the straits of Hercules, (now Gibraltar.)

"From Greece, and the countries bordering on Pontus, slaves and brass ware.

"From Armenia, horses, horsemen, and mules.

"From the gulf of Persia, and the isles within that gulf, horns (tusks) of ivory and ebony. The export of these isles was the manufactures of Tyre.

"From Syria, emeralds, purple, broidered work, fine linen, coral, and agate. The exports to Syria were the manufactures of Tyre in great quantities.

"From Judah and Israel, the finest wheat, honey, oil, and balsam.

"From Damascus, wine of Chalybon, (the country bordering on the modern Aleppo,) and wool in the fleece. The exports to Damascus were costly, and of various manufactures.

"From the tribe of Dan, situated nearest to the Philistines, the produce of Arabia, bright or wrought iron, cassia or cinnamon, and the calamus aromaticus. In conducting the transport of these articles, Dan went to and fro, that is, formed and conducted the caravans. By one interpretation they are said to come

from Uzal, and Uzal is said to be Sana, the capital of Yemen, in Arabia Felix.

"From the gulf of Persia, rich cloths for the decoration of chariots or horsemen.

"From Arabia Petrea and Hedjaz, lambs, rams, and goats.

"From Sabea and Oman, the best of spices: from India, gold and precious stones.

"From Mesopotamia, from Carrhæ and Babylonia, the Assyrians brought all sorts of exquisite things; fine manufactures, blue cloth, and broidered work, or fabrics of various colours, in chests of cedar, bound with cords, containing rich apparel. If these articles," says Vincent, "were obtained farther from the east, may they not be the fabrics of India, first brought to Assyria by the gulf of Persia, or by caravans from Karmania and the Indus, and then conveyed by the Assyrians in other caravans to Tyre and Sidon. In this view, the careful package, the chests of cedar, and the cording of the chest, are all correspondent to the nature of such transport.

"From Tarshish, the ships came that rejoiced in the markets of Tyre; they replenished the city, and made it glorious in the midst of the sea."*

How largely were the nations indebted to commerce for the conveniences and necessaries of life,

* Such is Vincent's interpretation of this very remarkable chapter. He also says, that from the Tarshish last mentioned, ships returned to the ports in the Red Sea, as from the 19th to the 24th verses every particular relates to the east; while that referred to in the 12th verse implies the west, Spain, or beyond. We have here some light thrown on the obscurity which surrounds the situation of this distant and unknown place. There appears to be a reference to two distinct places, or parts of the world, denominated Tarshish, which were at a great distance, and in opposite directions. That one was situated westward, and reached by a passage across the Mediterranean, is certain from several parts of Scripture; that the other was eastward, or southward, on the coasts of Arabia, India, or Africa, is equally certain.

even at that early day. How vastly preferable its results to those of the most successful warfare.

The prophet was directed to express strong censures of the pride and luxury of this small though powerful state, "whose merchants were as princes." Its ruler or prince, Ithobaal, even assumed the name and title of deity, actually considering himself more than man; this is expressly stated, Ezek. xxviii., where his pride is described, and his destruction foretold.

During the early part of the siege of Tyre, B.C. 582, Nebuchadnezzar sent into Judea to avenge the murder of Gedaliah. His forces carried away captive seven hundred and forty-five persons, Jer. lii. 30. The smallness of the number shows how few were the inhabitants of the land at this time, after many who had been left by the Chaldeans had retired into Egypt. It was indeed, "as the shaking of an olive tree, as the gleaning grapes when the vintage is done," Isa. xxiv. 13.

The military efforts of Nebuchadnezzar about this period were not confined to his proceedings in the west; he invaded Elam or Elymias, and took Shusan or Susa. This led to the wars with the Medes, ultimately causing the downfal of the Chaldean empire. The history of every mighty conqueror, from Nebuchadnezzar to Buonaparte, shows that it is to the progress of their conquests, and the pushing them without limit, that the destruction of the power they had obtained is to be ascribed. The invasion and conquest of Elam is noticed, Jer. xxv. 25, 26; xlix. 34, 35; and Ezek. xxxii. 11, 24.

One of these prophecies against Elam is very remarkable, Jer. xlix. 34—39;

> The word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah the prophet against Elam, in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts;
> Behold, I will break the bow of Elam,
> The chief of their might.

And upon Elam will I bring the four winds
From the four quarters of heaven,
And will scatter them toward all those winds;
And there shall be no nation
Whither the outcasts of Elam shall not come.
For I will cause Elam to be dismayed before their enemies;
And before them that seek their life:
And I will bring evil upon them,
Even my fierce anger, saith the Lord;
And I will send the sword after them,
Till I have consumed them:
And I will set my throne in Elam,
And will destroy from thence
The king and the princes, saith the Lord.
But it shall come to pass in the latter days,
That I will bring again the captivity of Elam, saith the Lord.

Here the dispersion of the Elamites is foretold, and their eventual restoration. But who are these outcasts; and when is their restoration to be dated? It has lately been inquired, whether those singular wanderers, the gipsies, may not be here spoken of. Persons who have been sedulous in their investigations respecting these singular beings, whose preservation as a separate people is only second to that of the Jews, find many circumstances, both in their traditions and in their habits, to favour this supposition; but it is mentioned here only as a conjecture.

The fortifications of Tyre were strong; the methods of attack upon such places were then rude and imperfect. Its wealth hired defenders for its walls, while its fleets procured whatever supplies might be needed. The siege was protracted; and when, at the end of thirteen years, the city was no longer tenable, Nebuchadnezzar found himself disappointed of his prey. The city was taken, but empty ruinous buildings alone remained. The inhabitants had retired with their effects, to an island a short distance from the main land, inaccessible to the Chaldean army while the Tyrians remained masters of the sea. There a new city arose. The Tyrians made terms with the conqueror, and

continued subject to Babylon till the end of the allotted period, but were preserved from spoliation, and speedily enriched by resuming their commerce.

The utter destruction spoken of came at length; for no word of Scripture can fall to the ground. The declaration, Ezek. xxvi. 14, has been witnessed by passengers in our own day, to be literally fulfilled. The poet thus describes what the traveller relates of Tyre:

I saw a lonely shore;
A rock and waters, and a waste
Of trackless sand; I heard the black seas roar,
And winds that rose and fell with gusty haste.
The fisher safely put into the bay,
And push'd his boat ashore; then gathered he
His nets, and hastening up the rocky way,
Spread them to catch the sun's warm evening ray.
And this was Tyre! how has decay
Within her palaces, a despot been;
Ruin and silence in her courts are met,
And on her city rock the fisher spreads his net.

Far different was the lot of Egypt, to which country Nebuchadnezzar led his disappointed army, that its plunder might recompense their hard services against Tyre, as spoken by Ezekiel xxix. 18—20.

Son of man, Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon caused his army
To serve a great service against Tyrus:
Every head was made bald, and every shoulder was peeled:
Yet had he no wages, nor his army, for Tyrus,
For the service that he had served against it:
Therefore thus saith the Lord God;
Behold, I will give the land of Egypt
Unto Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon;
And he shall take her multitude,
And take her spoil, and take her prey;
And it shall be the wages for his army.
I have given him the land of Egypt
For his labour wherewith he served against it.

This invasion took place in the year B.C. 570. The

Chaldean army met with little resistance; it quickly swept over the country from Migdol on the Red Sea at the north-east, to Syene to the south. The devastation of the "cruel lord and fierce king," Nebuchadrezzar, prophesied of by Isaiah, xix. 4, was such as to cause Egypt to lie desolate forty years. In a prophecy respecting the invasion and subjugation of this land by Nebuchadrezzar and his successors, Ezekiel declared that Egypt should in future be the basest of kingdoms, and no more have a prince of its own. History shows this has literally been fulfilled: Egypt has successively been subject to other powers; the Babylonians, Persians, Macedonians, Romans, Turks, and Mamelukes, all have exercised rule over Egypt: its rulers have been derived from other nations.

Ancient Galleys.

The Magi before Nebuchadnezzar.

CHAPTER VI.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR—HIS IDOLATRY—SHADRACH, MESHACH, AND ABEDNEGO—THE PRIDE AND HUMILIATION OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR.

THE subjugation of Egypt completed the conquests of Nebuchadnezzar. Returning to Babylon as ruler of the then known world, he considered his labours at an end, and that he had only to enjoy the fruits of his exertions, or to amuse himself by embellishing his capital. From this period, B.C. 570, the commencement of his universal dominion, the beginning of his reign is sometimes dated; and it appears right to be guided by this calculation in noticing the events recorded in the book of Daniel. Hales has shown good grounds for adopting this course; in the following pages we shall notice his views on several points

connected with the chronology of this period; they avoid and remove many difficulties, meet many of the cavils of infidels, and agree with the facts narrated in Scripture, and the dates mentioned therein.

According to this calculation, the first vision of Nebuchadnezzar was in B.C. 569, when having universal dominion, he could be addressed by Daniel as king of kings. The vision is recorded in Daniel ii.; it not only described the empire of Nebuchadnezzar, then just established in its full extent, as the head of pure gold, but it described the kingdoms of the Medes and Persians, of the Macedonians and Greeks, and of the Romans: all of which were to rule the earth in succession. Lastly, it described the kingdom of Christ, which should prevail, fill the whole earth, and continue to the end of time. The thoughts of this king's mind evidently were directed to his mighty empire, and to his being "ruler over all." He was pondering "what should come to pass hereafter," when this vision was sent to make known to him what should take place. Such is the statement of the prophet, addressed to the king himself.

It is thought by some, that Nebuchadnezzar did not forget his dream: but when he required the magi, or wise men, to tell the dream, as well as the interpretation, he put their claims to Divine inspiration to a fair test; for they assumed to be directed by Divine power in explanations of visions, and it was evident that the Omniscient Power could as easily cause them to know the dream itself as its meaning. The king's words, "the thing is gone from me," may be rendered, as it is in some versions, "the decree is gone from me," or "set forth by me," therefore unalterable. Destruction awaited these magi, unless they declared the dream, and the interpretation thereof. Adopting this view, we see how the superiority of Divine knowledge imparted to Daniel was shown, while the Chaldean sages were caught in their own devices, and prevented from attempting any deceit, or passing off a merely human interpretation upon their monarch.

Especially let the reader notice the earnest prayer of Daniel and his companions: they "desired mercies from before God concerning this secret." It is well that those who seek to participate in mercies, should join in prayer for the Divine favour. Mark, also, the emphatic language in which Daniel expressed his thanksgiving, when the Divine revelation was sent in answer to their prayer.

Daniel answered and said,
Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever:
For wisdom and might are his:
And he changeth the times and the seasons:
He removeth kings, and setteth up kings:
He giveth wisdom unto the wise,
And knowledge to them that know understanding:
He revealeth the deep and secret things:
He knoweth what is in the darkness,
And the light dwelleth with him.
I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers,
Who hast given me wisdom and might,
And hast made known unto me now what we desired of thee:
For thou hast now made known unto us the king's matter.

Not only is this Divine revelation very remarkable for the circumstances that brought it to notice, and showed that it was a prophetic vision, not a mere dream, or fantasy of the brain; it is connected with the other visions in the book of Daniel, also with the Revelation by St. John, being the commencement of a connected series of prophecies, extending even to the end of time.

Nebuchadnezzar was convinced that a Divine Spirit of wisdom was imparted to Daniel; he therefore not only honoured him agreeably to his decree, but made him chief governor, and at his request appointed his companions to conduct the affairs of the province of Babylon; thus bringing the children of the captivity into notice and honour. But this haughty monarch was not awed by the vision and the interpretation. In his pride of power and place, he seems to have

opposed the warning; and, in this spirit, to have set up the large image of gold, as narrated Dan. iii. The whole body was of gold, or covered with plates of gold, not merely the head; perhaps, to denote Nebuchadnezzar's confidence that his empire would be continued. It was in height sixty cubits, or ninety feet,

a colossal image; many such still remain:—this engraving represents one still standing among the remains of ancient Thebes in Egypt. Probably the height of a base or pedestal was included in the sixty cubits, otherwise the breadth of six cubits would be disproportionate for a human figure.

The statue of gold mentioned by Herodotus, which was placed in the temple of Belus, may have been this image. It was dedicated to Bel or Belus, the false

deity of the Babylonians, by which the sun was personified; and all, even the people of Jehovah, were required to fall prostrate before it to worship. This idolatrous worship was enforced with the capricious cruelty spoken of, Dan. v. 19, as part of the character of Nebuchadnezzar, and agrees with the mention of him in common history. Too often indeed has an eastern despot been known to order a valuable counsellor and devoted supporter to instantaneous death, from some momentary caprice. How thankful should those be whose lot is cast in more favoured lands! The Lord God interfered by the miraculous deliverance of Daniel's companions, though cast into a burning fiery furnace. The Angel of the Lord, the Son of God, appeared in a visible form, as on other occasions recorded in the Old Testament history, and Nebuchadnezzar was obliged to confess this miraculous interposition, as we read in Dan. iii. 28, 29;

> Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God. Therefore I make a decree, That every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill.

The full particulars of this event are best read in Dan. iii. The deliverance was a literal fulfilment of the promise, Isa. xliii. 2. Other saints and martyrs have also found the promise of the Lord's presence and support fully realized in later days. Though the power of the flames was not in their case restrained, so as "not to singe their garments, nor suffer even the smell of the fire to pass upon them;" yet they have been enabled to stand unshrinking on the burning pile, to "glorify the Lord in the fire," to

> Rejoice and clap their hands in flames,
> And dare to seal the truth with blood!

Finish'd their course, and fought their fight,
  Thence did their mounting souls aspire;
Starting from flesh, they took their flight,
  Borne upwards on a car of fire.

Nor has the afflicted and tempted believer been less supported by this precious promise, when scorched by the flames of temptation, or seeming in danger of being consumed by the fires of affliction. And whether under individual, or family, or national bereavements, nothing will enable the believer "to glorify the Lord in the fires," but the presence of Him who is King of kings, and Lord of lords; nor will this be withheld from the weakest and most humble of his people. The Jewish youths were cast into a furnace, probably a large hollow in the earth, heaped with the fiercest combustibles, yet the fire had no effect upon them: it only consumed the bands whereby they had been fettered, and left them at liberty to walk with their Saviour, and utter the praises of their Deliverer. Well is it for us, if the fires of affliction or trial consume the bands wherewith we are tied and bound, and in like manner loose us, and set us free to praise and serve our Redeemer, whose promise is, never to leave, never, never to forsake his people.

When persecution's torrent blaze
  Wraps the unshrinking martyr's head;
When fade all earthly flowers and bays,
  When summer friends are gone and fled,
Is he alone in that dark hour
Who owns the Lord of love and power?

Or waves there not around his brow
  A wand no human arm may wield,
Fraught with a spell no angels know,
  His steps to guide, his soul to shield?
Thou, Saviour, art his charmed bower,
His magic ring, his rock, his tower.

And when the wicked ones behold
  Thy favourites walking in thy light,
Just so, in fancied triumphs bold,
  They deem'd them lost in deadly night;
Amaz'd they cry, "What spell is this,
Which turns their sufferings all to bliss?"

The fourth chapter of Daniel records another vision of Nebuchadnezzar, which it is supposed he had B.C. 568. It is prefaced by a remarkable confession of the wondrous manner in which the Most High dealt with him. The vision represented a mighty tree rearing its head on high, but cut down by command of a heavenly messenger. Daniel gave the interpretation with courageous faithfulness: he spoke with power from above. It is recorded Dan. iv. 24—27;

> This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which is come upon my lord the king: That they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. And whereas they commanded to leave the stump of the tree roots; thy kingdom shall be sure unto thee, after that thou shalt have known that the heavens do rule. Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity.

Whatever impression might at the moment have been made by this solemn warning, it seems to have passed speedily away. Amidst the pomp and might which surrounded Nebuchadnezzar, his spirit of arrogance increased. About a year afterwards, while walking in his hanging gardens,

> The monarch glanced an eye of pride
> On all his regal power had done;
> For, stretched beneath him far and wide,
> Glitter'd resplendent Babylon.
>
> Palace on palace, tower on tower,
> In heaven-defying grandeur rose;
> And one, the pinnacle of power,
> Whose very base was built on those.
>
> And in that tower of towers was seen
> The king of all that pageantry:
> While pride was in the monarch's mien,
> And pride was glancing from his eye.

But the impious declaration, and the immediate judgment that followed, are best given in the words of Scripture, Dan. iv. 29—33.

At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon. The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty? While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee. And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.

The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws.

Of all the awful events which prove the nothingness of man in his best estate, none is more striking than the case of a mighty monarch, once remarkable for his wisdom and his valour, bereft of that reason which constitutes the superiority of man over the beasts of the field.

The instance of Nebuchadnezzar was a very peculiar one. He became as a beast; the form taken by his mental disease is considered to have resembled that called Lycanthropy, in which the sufferer imagines himself to be a brute, and acts like one. In this state the fallen monarch continued seven years, eating grass as the oxen, and exposed to the dew of heaven; but, doubtless, carefully watched and guarded from injury. At the expiration of that period, his reason was restored, when he acknowledged the hand that smote him, and professed himself a sincere believer in the Lord Jehovah; according to his own words, Dan. iv. 1—3; 34—37;

Nebuchadnezzar the king, unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be

multiplied unto you. I thought it good to show the signs and wonders that the high God had wrought toward me. How great are his signs! and how mighty are his wonders! his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation.

And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me; and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me.

Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.

Thus there is reason to believe that Nebuchadnezzar became a monument of Divine mercy: he must have deeply abhorred his former proud, impious, and cruel conduct; but he was not allowed any lengthened opportunity to evidence this change. The Divine sovereignty was fully vindicated by the fact, by the indisputable testimony placed upon the national record, and confirmed by revelation; but the course of Divine providence was forwarded by other and different instruments. It is thought that Nebuchadnezzar only lived a few months after his reason was restored.

During the illness of Nebuchadnezzar, it is considered that the government was conducted by his queen, Nicotris, to whose wisdom and abilities historians bear record, and who continued to carry into execution his plans for the improvement of Babylon.

Daniel before the king of Babylon.

CHAPTER VII.

EVIL-MERODACH—BELSHAZZAR—THE VISIONS OF DANIEL.

We now come to a period of history which has much perplexed most of the historians and chronologers. Scripture does not afford any continued clew to guide us through this maze, but it supplies some insulated notices, which serve to test any scheme proposed to us. The view taken by Hales, the latest and most accurate of modern chronological historians, seems the safest and the best; but it is unnecessary here to give all the reasons for adopting the calculations which influenced him. These will be found in his own work, and well deserve examination: they are not vague ideas of his own, but are founded upon the accounts

of the earliest and best historians, and agree with the notices in Scripture.

The son of Nebuchadnezzar, called Evil-Merodach in the Bible, and Ilvarodan in common history, succeeded his father, B.C. 561. On his accession to the throne, he liberated Jehoiachin king of Judah, after a captivity of thirty-seven years. Evil-Merodach treated him kindly, even setting him above the other kings then at Babylon, Jer. lii. 32; 2 Kings xxv. 28. It is thought that Evil-Merodach, having displeased his father by unprovoked acts of hostility against the Medes, by whom he was defeated, was imprisoned by Nebuchadnezzar before his illness, and then becoming an associate of the Jewish prince, was disposed to treat him kindly when himself on the throne.

The reign of Evil-Merodach was short. The Medes had become more powerful by uniting with the Persians. The king of Babylon assembled the forces of his tributary states; but Cyrus, being appointed general of the Medes and Persians, anticipated the plans of Evil-Merodach, attacked and defeated his army, and slew Evil-Merodach himself, after a short reign of three years.

Belshazzar succeeded to the throne of Babylon, B.C. 558. He was the son of Evil-Merodach, and exceeded his father and grandfather in acts of cruelty and violence. Some consider that Isaiah, xiv. 29, contains a prophetic description of these three oppressors.

> Rejoice not thou, whole Palestina,
> Because the rod of him that smote thee is broken:
> For out of the serpent's root shall come forth a cockatrice,
> And his fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent.

During the reign of Belshazzar, Daniel had the remarkable visions recorded, ch. vii. and viii. In the first of them, the prophet saw another emblematic representation of the four great empires, concluding with a glorious vision of that most awful event, the great and solemn day of judgment, described in language

which often is referred to by our blessed Lord and his apostles, as recorded in the New Testament.

> I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened. I beheld then because of the voice of the great words which the horn spake: I beheld even till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame. As concerning the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away: yet their lives were prolonged for a season and time.
>
> I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.

In this vision, the beast representing the fourth, or Roman empire, especially drew the attention of the prophet; particularly as to its ten horns, and a little horn which took the place of three others, and which appeared to have "eyes as the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things." He asked for an explanation of this symbol; some particulars were imparted to him, from whence commentators consider this horn represents popery; its proceedings and ultimate fate are described, Dan. vii. 25, 26;

> And he shall speak great words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time. But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end.

This, and some other prophecies in Scripture, appear clearly to point out that the removal and

destruction of that anti-christian power is to be in the last days. The believer must not expect its removal sooner, but may be sure of its utter destruction at that time. Meanwhile, the Most High can restrain the fury of this persecuting power, and he will preserve his saints from being utterly destroyed.

The Lord will come! the earth shall quake,
The hills their fixed seat forsake;
And, withering, from the vault of night
The stars withdraw their feeble light.

The Lord will come! but not the same
As once in lowly form he came,
A silent Lamb to slaughter led,
The bruis'd, the suffering, and the dead.

The Lord will come! an awful form,
With wreath of flame, and robe of storm,
On cherub wings, and wings of wind,
Anointed Judge of human kind.

Can this be He who wont to stray
A pilgrim on the world's highway;
By power oppress'd, and mocked by pride?
Yes, this is He, the crucified!

Go, tyrants! to the rocks complain!
Go, seek the mountains cleft in vain!
But faith, victorious o'er the tomb,
Shall sing for joy—The Lord is come!

The other vision, two years afterwards, was more full as to approaching events, though it also stretched away into years far distant, and extended even to the times of the end. This vision especially represented the invasion and conquest of the Persians by the Greeks, led by Alexander, and the division of the empire among his successors. Here also was reference to a mysterious power as a little horn, but evidently not to be identified with that of the former vision. Some have considered it was realized in Antiochus, a few centuries afterwards; but the opinion best supported by later writers on prophecy, refer it to Mohammedanism, a system skilfully adapted by the

prince of darkness to inthral the nations of the East, and which has, in its day, been nearly, if not quite, as destructive both to body and soul, as the papacy. The proceedings and fate of this system, are also told in decisive terms, Dan. viii. 23—26;

> And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors are come to the full, a king of fierce countenance, and understanding dark sentences, shall stand up. And his power shall be mighty, but not by his own power: and he shall destroy wonderfully, and shall prosper, and practise, and shall destroy the mighty and the holy people. And through his policy also he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart, and by peace shall destroy many: he shall also stand up against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without hand.

Only one incident of Belshazzar's reign is related in Scripture; it was the closing scene, and exhibits the vileness of his character, displayed with impious daring. Xenophon, however, states particular instances of his cruelty. He caused a youth, the only son of Gobryas, one of his nobles, to be slain, because the young man, when hunting, struck a bear and a lion which the king had missed. He committed a brutal outrage upon another courtier, named Gadatas, merely because he heard him commended by one of the royal concubines. To the efforts of these injured nobles, Xenophon ascribes the fall of Belshazzar; but erroneously connects their proceedings with the siege of Babylon by Cyrus, which took place a few years later.

Belshazzar made a great feast, at which he entertained a thousand of his lords. His impiety was signally displayed and promptly punished. When heated with wine, the impious monarch caused the sacred vessels of gold and silver, taken by Nebuchadnezzar from the temple at Jerusalem, to be brought forward. The infatuated guests, "the king and his princes, his wives and his concubines," profaned these sacred vessels. "They drank wine, and praised the gods of

gold and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood and of stone;" thus directly insulting the Most High, whose almighty power had been, not long before, expressly acknowledged by Nebuchadnezzar.

The revelry was soon changed to fear. "In the same hour" the fingers of a man's hand appeared, and as they passed along the wall, distinctly traced characters on its surface, opposite the royal seat.

—— Along the illumined wall,
Startling, yet inviting the eyes of all,
Darkly it moves, a hand, the fingers of a hand
O'er the bright lamp of that resplendent hall,
In silence tracing, as a mystic wand,
Words all unknown, the tongue of some far distant land.

The king was struck with fear and amazement. He called aloud for the astrologers and soothsayers, offering rank and wealth to whoever could tell him the import of the characters distinctly exhibited before them. They confessed their ignorance; a scene of confusion and alarm followed; when the queen mother, Nicotris, who had absented herself, or withdrawn from this impious feast, came and advised that Daniel, whose wisdom, Divine light, and understanding, had been formerly distinctly recognized, but who had been neglected by this vile debauchee, should be sent for and consulted.

The prophet came; he rebuked the wretched monarch, and refused his proferred reward, but proceeded to read the characters traced on the wall. It is supposed they were the ancient Hebrew letters, therefore unknown to the Babylonian sages; indeed, it appears that, during the captivity, these ancient characters were disused by the Jews themselves, who adopted the Chaldee, which thenceforward became the Hebrew, and has been preserved as such.

The interpretation could only be made known to Daniel by the Holy Spirit. He communicated it to Belshazzar, and from the words, "MENE, MENE,

TEKEL, UPHARSIN," warned him that the hour of mercy was departing, and that of judgment at hand. The king heard his doom, but we do not hear of any call for mercy in that awful crisis, though he acknowledged the truth of Daniel's words, by causing him to receive the promised reward. And "in that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain."

This is all that we read in the Bible respecting the death of Belshazzar, and we know it must be true; but Xenophon has added, what is *not* in Scripture, that Babylon was *in that* night taken by Cyrus, and most writers have followed his statements. But the connecting that circumstance with the death of Belshazzar or not, is a question which rests only on the conflicting authorities of some general historians; it is no where stated in Scripture. Hales has fully shown the ground upon which the account of other historians is to be preferred to that of Xenophon. It appears this event took place when no hostile army besieged Babylon, but when the thousand lords might freely resort thither from their governments to the feast given by their monarch. In the conclusion of the scene of impious revelry, after the solemn warning just described, the king fell by the hand of conspirators; perhaps headed by the injured nobles Gobryas and Gadates, said by Xenophon to have avenged themselves upon Belshazzar. "In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain."

The history of Xenophon, though containing several historical facts, is in many respects a personal and romantic account of Cyrus; written also as a developement of the philosophical views of the author, rather than as the history of a kingdom for a period of time, and it is in several respects contradicted by the earlier historians. From their accounts, it appears that Belshazzar was succeeded by his son Laborosarchod, a child, who died or was slain nine months afterwards. The family of Nebuchadnezzar being thus extinct, the Chaldean or Babylonian dynasty was at an

end: and then, to use the words of Scripture, "Darius the Mede took" (or as the word may be rendered, accepted) "the kingdom," to which he was called by the nobles, with the general consent of the people.*

Darius or Cyaxeres, the uncle of Cyrus, was brother to the queen mother, Nicotris, whose wisdom and influence have already been noticed; the support of Daniel, and of the most powerful princes of the empire, who alone could intermeddle with the succession, would be secured in his favour.

* The following brief summary gives the accounts usually adopted, relative to the death of Belshazzar and the taking of Babylon, in contrast with that preferred by Hales, from Berosus, Ptolemy, and others.

The Common Statement.

B.C. 562, *Nebuchadnezzar* died, and was succeeded by his son

Evil-Merodach; who after a tyrannical reign of two years, was assassinated by his brother-in-law *Neriglissar*, who succeeded him

in 560. He was slain in battle by Cyrus, and,

in 565, *Laborosoarchod*, his son, succeeded to the throne. He was infamous for cruelty, and was assassinated by two nobles whom he had treated very cruelly.

This was in 554, when his son *Nabonadius*, or *Labynetus*, or *Naboandel*, the grandson of *Evil-Merodach*, gained the throne. This monarch is by some said to be the Belshazzar of Scripture, and to have been slain in 538, when Babylon was taken by Cyrus.

Hales and others.

B.C. 561, *Evil-Merodach* came to the throne, and was slain in a battle with the Medes and Persians in 558, when his son, *Neriglissar*, succeeded him. He is to be considered the Belshazzar of Scripture, and was killed by conspirators at his impious feast, as recorded by Daniel.

His son, a boy, succeeded him in 553. This was *Laborosoarchod*, who died nine months afterwards, when the kingdom came peaceably to *Darius* or *Cyaxeres*, who appointed *Nabonadius*, or *Labynetus* to be viceroy or king of Babylon. He afterwards took part in the general revolt against the Medes, and was subdued the last, in 536, when Cyrus besieged and took Babylon, as foretold by the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah.

Daniel in the den of lions.

CHAPTER VIII.

DARIUS—DANIEL PERSECUTED—HIS PRAYER AND THE ANSWER—ACCESSION OF CYRUS.

THE accession of Darius the Mede to the throne of Babylon, took place B.C. 553; the common history respecting this event is fully confirmed by Scripture. He immediately placed Daniel at the head of his government, which excited the envy of the princes. They wickedly conspired, but could find no error or fault in him. Of what other earthly ruler could this be said with

truth? The reason is stated, "he was faithful:" he firmly relied upon his God, and acted uprightly according to the Divine word, and in the strength of the Lord. They could find no occasion against Daniel, except concerning the law of his God. To compass their design, they flattered the king, inducing him to assume to himself the place or office of the Most High, and to allow no prayer to be offered for thirty days, excepting to himself. Infatuated must the monarch have been, when he was induced to listen to such an application!

Daniel shrunk not from his duty; he was found guilty of praying to the Most High: the absurd rule, that no decree of a Median or Persian monarch, however wrong or unfounded, could be departed from, was urged. The king sought to escape from the snare, but found no way to do so. Daniel was cast into the den of lions, but the king believed he would be Divinely protected from them, and therefore took the precaution of sealing the stone which covered the den with his own signet, that no other attempts on the life of Daniel should be made by the unprincipled, cruel enemies of the prophet.

The letter of the law being complied with, the king, after a sleepless night, hastened to the den. No manner of hurt was found upon Daniel, because he believed in his God. Darius now resolved to deliver himself from the pernicious counsellors who had misled him; they were cast into the den of lions; when it was clearly seen that no human means had been used to shut the mouths of the furious beasts. The lions had instant mastery over these vile presidents and princes; the furious beasts broke all their bones in pieces before they reached the bottom of the den. The anxiety of Darius for his faithful counsellor is shown by the narrative. The conviction forced upon his mind by the event, and the miraculous deliverance of the prophet, were placed upon public record by king Darius in the remarkable decree, which we read in

Daniel vi. 25—27, and which was circulated throughout this vast empire.

> Then king Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel; for he is the living God, and stedfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end. He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.

This narrative conveys much instruction to later ages. How clearly the folly and wickedness of all persecuting enactments concerning matters of religion are shown; and let all who seek to keep others from prayer, or who disbelieve its efficacy, see with whom they must be ranked, and learn to fear and to repent. No human laws can take away the duty, or deprive us of the privilege, of communing with our God in prayer. Let us also learn, that we must not shrink from that outward avowal of our faith, which our stations and situations in life may call us to make. Again, observe, that the most exalted are bound publicly to serve the Lord, and to cast themselves before the throne of grace as humble suppliants. Daniel knew better than to risk his soul for the sake of preserving his life, at most for a few short years, and for the still greater uncertainty of earthly honours. There may, indeed, sometimes be seen needless scrupulosity, and obstinate contending for what are trifles; but there is a wide difference between this, and the neglect or disavowal of our Lord and Master, with the proneness we so often see, to conform to evil practices through the fear of man. May we be kept from indifference, as well as from error on these all important subjects.

> Let each in stedfast humbleness
> Kneel on to Him, who loves to bless
> The prayer that waits for Him; and trembling strive
> To keep the lingering flame in their own breasts alive.

While this statement respecting the events that attended and followed the death of Belshazzar, is quite in accordance with the narrative in the sacred book of Daniel, it is strictly in conformity with other prophecies that relate to Cyrus, and connect him with the taking of Babylon, the humbling of its power, and the liberation of the Jews. It will be seen that this view presents them still more clearly, and in a more perfect connexion, than the narrative of Xenophon. Nor does it prevent the remarkable prophecy, Isa. xiv. 3—27, from being referred to Belshazzar, whose character and end, and that of his son, seem to be there plainly set forth, as well as the fate of the golden city of Babylon. After a striking personification of the chief ones of the earth, and the kings of the nations, rising from their graves, as moved to meet the descendant of Nebuchadnezzar, and greet him ;

> Art thou become weak also as we?
> Art thou become like unto us?

It is declared,

> The seed of evil doers shall never be renowned.
> Prepare slaughter for his children
> For the iniquity of their fathers;
> That they do not rise, nor possess the land,
> Nor fill the face of the world with cities.
> For I will rise up against them,
> Saith the Lord of hosts,
> And cut off from Babylon the name, and remnant,
> And son, and nephew, saith the Lord.
> I will also make it a possession for the bittern, and pools of water:
> And I will sweep it with the besom of destruction, saith the Lord of hosts.

Darius was sixty-two years old when he became monarch of the Chaldean empire ; he appointed Nabonadius to be ruler or viceroy in Babylon. But when Darius had only reigned two years, he died, in the year B.C. 551. In addition to the minute narrative of the deliverance of the prophet from the lions, there is a

remarkable account in the ninth chapter of Daniel, connected with this reign.

The advancement of the prophet did not make him indifferent as to spiritual intercourse with his God; he was also very anxious respecting the people of his own nation. From Dan. ix. 1, 2, we find that he studied the book of the prophecy of Jeremiah. He did this with earnest prayer, and was enabled to understand that the Lord would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.

He then engaged still more earnestly in prayer and supplications, "with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes." The prayer, or confession, is a beautiful and impressive example of the manner in which one, truly anxious for the forgiveness of his own sins and those of others, may draw near unto the Lord. Especially the deep humiliation for sin is to be marked, and his solemn declaration, "we do not present" (or cause to fall) "our supplications before thee for our righteousness, but for thy great mercies." Daniel seems evidently to have been directed to contemplate the greatest of mercies—the gift of the only Son of God, to die upon the cross for the sins of men, and to rise for their justification. An immediate answer was sent by an angelic messenger, whom the prophet was permitted to behold, and through him Daniel was caused to understand and record the time when the promised Messiah should appear upon earth, Dan. ix. 24—27,

> Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy.
>
> Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.
>
> And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince

that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.

And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.

The periods of time are, by most writers, considered to be expressed here, and elsewhere in prophecy, a day for a year. Prideaux remarks, that if the seventy weeks of years, or four hundred and ninety years, are calculated from the seventh year of Artaxerxes, when Ezra was commissioned to restore the Jewish state and polity, we are brought to the very same month, A.D. 33, in which many consider that our Lord suffered, or "was cut off, but not for himself."

Later writers have gone still more minutely into the calculations of the times here mentioned. Gresswell's calculation may briefly be stated as follows:—The seven weeks or forty-nine years, with the sixty-two weeks or four hundred and thirty-four years, form a period of four hundred and eighty-three years, extending from B.C. 458, the seventh year of Artaxerxes, when Ezra arrived at Jerusalem, to A.D. 26, when John the Baptist began his ministry, and Christ commenced his ministry a few months afterwards. The one week employed in confirming or making good the covenant to many, he understands as seven years after the death of Christ, during which the gospel was preached to Jews only. The first space of seven weeks is supposed to refer to a period of forty-nine years, occupied in restoring the Jews and the rebuilding of Jerusalem. The distinct manner in which this prophecy points out the period when the Christ should come is very remarkable, and cannot be opposed by the Jews with fair arguments.

It is certain that the Jewish nation in general was led to look for the appearance of the Messiah, about

the time of Christ's coming. This probably might be the interpretation of the ancient Targum, or Jewish commentary on Daniel, and may account for that Targum having been destroyed, while those on the other books of the Old Testament remain. The Jews show that they are aware of the force of the reasoning founded on this passage, by denouncing a terrible curse on all who dare to compute the times here mentioned. They also now rank the book of Daniel, not as a prophetical, but as an historical book, although there is the fullest evidence that both before and shortly after our blessed Lord appeared upon the earth, this book was reckoned among the prophetic writings. Josephus expressly speaks of Daniel as one of the greatest of the prophets, whose writings were in daily use among the Jews, at the time when he lived, as one who wrote under the dictates of the infallible Spirit, who was admitted into immediate converse with God, who not only predicted events to come, but declared the time of their fulfilment.

Cyrus was nephew of Darius or Cyaxeres, and his successor. This very remarkable individual had been designated by name, by Isaiah, more than a century before his birth. He was pointed out as the conqueror of Babylon, and the restorer of the Jewish nation from their captivity, long before that captivity began. In this remarkable prophecy, see Isa. xliv. and xlv., there is a special reference to the Divine sovereignty in selecting this instrument for the fulfilment of God's will, Isa. xlv. 4—6,

For Jacob my servant's sake,
And Israel mine elect,
I have even called thee by thy name:
I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me.
I am the Lord, and there is none else,
There is no God beside me:
I girded thee, though thou hast not known me:
That they may know from the rising of the sun,
And from the west, that there is none beside me.
I am the Lord, and there is none else.

The peaceable accession of Cyrus to the Medo-Persian empire, including the Chaldean monarchy, is confirmed by some passages in the apocryphal writings.

The words, Dan. vi. 28, "So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian," do not imply a great convulsion or change in Babylon, but the quiet continuance of the prophet in the post of honour and authority, from whence his enemies had in vain sought to cast him down. Cyrus had virtually been ruler of Babylon from the time when the dynasty of Nebuchadnezzar ceased. His uncle Cyaxeres, the Darius of Scripture, was inferior to him in abilities: he felt and complained that his nephew was regarded as his superior. Xenophon represents him expressing himself strongly thereon. The new monarch having already directed the public affairs, would be the better prepared duly to appreciate the wisdom and services of Daniel.

An ancient roll, or record.

CHAPTER IX.

THE STATE OF THE JEWS AT BABYLON—THEIR INTERCOURSE WITH OTHER NATIONS—THEIR ANTICIPATIONS OF DELIVERANCE.

BEFORE proceeding to any particulars respecting the liberation of the Jews from Chaldea, it is desirable to notice how their residence in Babylon brought them into contact with the most celebrated and influential nations of the heathen world. At that time Egypt was farther advanced in literature and the arts than any other country, and Greece was beginning to rise towards the commanding position which it afterwards occupied. The intercourse of traffic between Judea and Egypt was frequent, it had been so ever since the reign of Solomon. We have seen that a considerable

number of the Jews took refuge in that country, which they erroneously thought would afford them a safe shelter from the Chaldeans. The conquest of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar did much to "diminish" it, to bring down "the pride of her power," and "the pomp of her strength," and "set darkness upon the land." After this event, much of the interest strangers had entertained respecting Egypt would be transferred to Babylon. Also Nebuchadnezzar, after mixing up all the nations round Judea, as it were into one mass, by his conquests, would remove to that city all that was most esteemed and valued. Thus Babylon would present many attractions to those who travelled, either to gratify curiosity or to gain knowledge; accordingly we find that many of them visited Babylon. The Jews had been removed thither more thoroughly than any other nation; they dwelt there as a separate people, while the spoils of their land were seen in the temples, and Jews were the chief men of the state.

To every reflecting and searching mind, the Jewish nation, with their remarkable peculiarities of manners and of doctrine, must have been objects of interest and inquiry; while the religious truths they held and advocated, would arrest the attention of all who felt the emptiness and vanity of heathen idolatry. Accordingly we find that the systems of Thales and Pythagoras, the earliest philosophers of Europe, contain much that is evidently derived from the Jews, especially respecting the nature of the Supreme Being and the creation of the world. Thales and Solon no doubt had become acquainted with the Jews and the Jewish system in Egypt, if not in Palestine, and Pythagoras resided at Babylon during the latter part of the captivity, when he must have witnessed the events connected with this deliverance, and would have intercourse with Daniel, one of the captive nation, but exalted to be a ruler of the land. He would be there when the Jews set forth on their return to Palestine, and reasons have been shown for considering that he

had Ezekiel for his teacher. It is clear that his philosophy and the remains of his writings, though only a small portion has come down to us, show an acquaintance with a purer source than the fables of Egypt.

Thus it is more than probable, that the general system of philosophy, then starting forth, and taking the place of abject and degraded idolatries among the reflecting portion of the heathen world, received a very important impulse from the Jews. It is not possible to say how far this influence was beneficial to succeeding generations, but God does nothing in vain. There is just reason to believe, that the advance of philosophy was a great step towards freeing the world from the monstrous and debasing superstitions of Pagan polytheism. Yet it was but a step; for philosophy, at best, is but darkness in all matters concerning the redemption of the soul, and often renders matters still more obscure: gross darkness still prevailed; yet there were indications of the dawn of better days.

Townsend, who has noticed this subject, points out some traces of acquaintance with the Jewish sacred writings in the works of Eschylus, one of the earliest of the Greek poets, who lived at this period. These are, however, but faint; and the intercourse with the Jews is more apparent in the philosophy of the Greeks than in their general literature; still every glimmer of light was important. It prepared for that day when the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek, and when the sacred word of the New Testament was sent forth in the Greek, the language then generally known through the civilized world; so that the Greek language became the special means of diffusing the truths of Christianity.

If the Jewish captivity thus influenced the learned men of distant nations, it would have considerable effect upon the sages of the people among whom they dwelt. Accordingly, we find that Zoroaster, the chief philosopher of the Eastern nations, showed his acquaintance with the truths made known by the Jews. Also the

advantages arising from the power of a governor who feared the Lord, such as Daniel, must have been sensibly felt by all classes. Yet, being captives and a despised people, the Jews had much to endure. They were often exposed to persecutions, especially during the early part of their abode in Babylon, both from those in authority and from the mass of the people. Even contempt would be peculiarly mortifying to the pride of the generality of the nation, who, considering themselves as a people favoured of God, were too much disposed to be lifted up at all times; even in adversity they would hardly be disposed to look aright for the source and causes of their troubles. Yet these were clearly pointed out to them by their prophets, and they are noticed in the language of many of the Psalms. The 130th Psalm, in particular, contains expressions which show a deep sense of the evil of sin: see also the 25th and the 89th. But, in the 137th Psalm, their wrongs and sufferings are most vividly depicted; these roused an indignant spirit, expressed in the latter portion of it; but very inadequately rendered in our English version, and perhaps weakened, rather than strengthened, by the efforts of modern poetry. The embittered spirit with which the Jew still regards the humbled state of his nation, and the loss of its former glory now so long gone by, gives us a faint idea, yet but a faint idea, of the manner in which his sense of the situation of his nation would be expressed by a Jewish captive in Babylon.

Loved Zion! should a foreign land
  E'er blot thine image from my heart,
Mute be my tongue, unnerved my hand,
  And quite forgot my tuneful art!
For thee my lays shall ever flow
In melting sounds that waken woe!

Thy vengeance, Lord! let Edom feel,
  Who pitiless beheld her fall,
Edged with new rage the hostile steel,
  And triumphed o'er her broken wall.

"Spread, spread," he cried, "her ruins round,
And rase her glory to the ground."

Proud Babel! tremble at thy doom!
I see, I see, thy dreadful day!
Soon shall the fierce avenger come,
Who shall our mighty wrongs repay,
And hardened to the mothers' moans,
Dash her dear infants on the stones.

How much more forcibly the animated feelings of the suffering exile are depicted in the simple words of Scripture!

If I forget thee, O Jerusalem,
Let my right hand forget her cunning.
If I do not remember thee,
Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth;
If I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.

Let the right hand, that hand which by instinctive knowledge proceeds most promptly and faithfully to discharge every duty, and to perform every office of life, let that hand remain negligent and indifferent.

The Divine message, communicated by Jeremiah, has already been referred to; but it may be here quoted, as it shows the particulars of the settlement in the land of their captivity, which the Jews were directed to seek, Jer. xxix. 5—7:

Build ye houses, and dwell in them;
And plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them;
Take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters;
And take wives for your sons,
And give your daughters to husbands;
That ye may be increased there, and not diminished.
And seek the peace of the city
Whither I have caused you to be carried away captives,
And pray unto the Lord for it:
For in the peace thereof ye shall have peace.

Although the Jew was thus, as it were, to make himself "at home" in this strange land, it was only for an appointed time, and it was to be as a separate people.

As thousands of Jews have done in later days, many perhaps then conformed to the habits and usages around them, and thus forsaking their own people, as well as their fathers' God, became absorbed among the nations; but it is plain, that the distinctions and separations were kept up and continued by those who feared the Lord.

Nor were the captive Jews without the means of grace; their attention was constantly kept up by a succession of prophecies and miracles, which have been already noticed. There was no temple, there were no sacrifices, but they assembled to hear the word from the prophets and teachers. They attended upon them in their houses: see Ezek. xiv. 1; xx. 1: they united in prayer and praise, and listened to instruction. Many declarations of the Holy Spirit were given, showing that this spiritual worship was acceptable to the Lord. The advantages of the means of grace were felt; and it is generally considered that these assemblies led to the regular establishment of synagogue worship on their return to Judea.

The writings of the early prophets would also be often referred to; the truth with which the sufferings had been predicted would give full confidence in those that related to deliverance. The express predictions of Isaiah, as to the destruction of Babylon, would engage their earnest attention, in a manner of which we can now form no adequate idea. The passage, Isa. xiv. 1—6, must often have been the theme of their discourse, and caused many joyful anticipations.

For the Lord will have mercy on Jacob,
And will yet choose Israel,
And set them in their own land:
And the strangers shall be joined with them,
And they shall cleave to the house of Jacob.
And the people shall take them, and bring them to their place:
And the house of Israel shall possess them in the land of the Lord
For servants and handmaids:

And they shall take them captives, whose captives they were;
And they shall rule over their oppressors.
And it shall come to pass in the day that the Lord shall give thee rest
From thy sorrow, and from thy fear,
And from the hard bondage
Wherein thou wast made to serve,
That thou shalt take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say,
How hath the oppressor ceased!
The golden city ceased!
The Lord hath broken the staff of the wicked,
And the sceptre of the rulers.
He who smote the people in wrath
With a continual stroke,
He that ruled the nations in anger,
Is persecuted, and none hindereth.

The books of the prophets would also supply other and more wondrous subjects for their meditation; many conferences would be held respecting them. Often would Isaiah liii. be earnestly scanned, ver. 1—5:

Who hath believed our report?
And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?
For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant,
And as a root out of a dry ground:
He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him,
There is no beauty that we should desire him.
He is despised and rejected of men;
A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief:
And we hid as it were our faces from him;
He was despised, and we esteemed him not.
Surely he hath borne our griefs,
And carried our sorrows:
Yet we did esteem him stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted.
But he was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities:
The chastisement of our peace was upon him;
And with his stripes we are healed.

It was by books that Daniel ascertained the years

of the captivity, and from the latter part of that chapter, Dan. ix., it is evident that his examination of the writings of the prophets had led him to right views of the coming of the Messiah. Others would doubtless participate in these inquiries, seeking also that knowledge which, though then seen but as through a glass darkly, made them wise unto salvation, by the same faith which animated the patriarchs, who, though they only saw the promises afar off, yet were persuaded of them, and embraced them.

There were other Scriptures which must have been felt as very applicable in their captivity. Among these the portion of Deuteronomy, now numbered as the 29th and 30th chapters, would be noticed; and the prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the temple would lead some, at least, to "bethink themselves," and to make supplication in the land whither they were carried captives, saying "We have sinned, we have done perversely, and have committed wickedness;" and "so to return unto the Lord with all their heart, and with all their soul, in the land of their enemies." Many would follow the example of Daniel, exclaiming,

O holy mountain of my God,
  How do thy towers in ruin lie!
How art thou riven, and strewn abroad,
  Under the rude and wasteful sky!

Even the idolatries around them would be means of convincing many Jews of their own superior advantages, as well as of showing one great cause for their present state; and, while acknowledging God's justice and their own sinfulness, they would express themselves in the words of Psalm cxv. 1—9, contrasting the almighty power of Jehovah with the senseless idols before them:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us,
But unto thy name give glory,
For thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake.
Wherefore should the heathen say,
Where is now their God?

But our God is in the heavens:
He hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.
  Their idols are silver and gold,
The work of men's hands.
They have mouths—but they speak not:
Eyes have they—but they see not:
They have ears—but they hear not:
Noses have they—but they smell not:
They have hands—but they handle not:
Feet have they—but they walk not:
Neither speak they through their throat.
They that make them are like unto them;
So is every one that trusteth in them.
  O Israel, trust thou in the Lord:
He is their help and their shield.

Such would be the situation and the occupations of the Jews in their captivity; those among them, who felt their state and condition aright, would acknowledge the benefits of adversity, and would say with the Psalmist, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes." It is most probable that the 119th Psalm, which so fully describes the experience of the believer, and the value of the Holy Scriptures, was written during the captivity, or shortly afterwards, with direct reference to what had been learned in those days of trial. There would, however, be many who cared for none of these things, who sought only the things of this life, and added to the afflictions of their brethren. They are addressed in various passages of the Psalms. Psa. l. 16—23, may be considered as applicable to them. The warning is solemn, ver. 20—22:

  Thou sittest and speaketh against thy brother;
Thou slanderest thine own mother's son.
These things hast thou done, and I kept silence;
Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself:
But I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.
Now consider this, ye that forget God,
Lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.

CHAPTER X.

CYRUS.

HAVING now arrived at the period when the captivity was ended, a sketch of the life of Cyrus seems desirable; it is given chiefly from Hales, who has taken much pains to compare the accounts of ancient historians. The birth of Cyrus is placed in the year B.C. 599. He was the grandson of Astyages, king of the Medes, by his daughter Mandane, who was married to Cambyses, the prince or ruler of Persia. Cyrus was brought up at home, according to the simple and hardy manner of that people, till he was twelve years of age; when he visited his grandfather, and gained the esteem and notice of the Medes by his good conduct. When he was about sixteen, he accompanied his grandfather in opposing a predatory inroad of Evil-Merodach, son of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, the success being chiefly owing to the valour of Cyrus. This was B.C. 584. He afterwards returned to Persia.

Astyages died B.C. 566, and was succeeded by his son Cyaxeres, (or Darius the Mede of Scripture.) Cyrus became king of Persia B.C. 559, on the death of his father Cambyses. Evil-Merodach had succeeded to the throne of Babylon B.C. 561, when recollecting his defeat by the Medes, and desirous of adding that country to the Chaldean or Assyrian monarchy, he induced the Lydians, with other nations of Western Asia, as well as the Indians in the East, to become his confederates, and prepared for an expedition against the Medes and Persians. Cyaxeres appointed his nephew Cyrus to be his general. With the combined army of the Medes and Persians he first surprised the king of Armenia,

who was about to join the Chaldeans, then anticipating the intended invasion, he attacked the Babylonians and their confederates, and slew Evil-Merodach: this was B.C. 558.

Cyrus afterwards invaded Assyria, where he was joined by Gobryas and Gadatas, two noblemen who had been ill-used by Belshazzar, the son and successor of Evil-Merodach, who was defeated by Cyrus, B.C. 554. In the following year, Belshazzar was slain by conspirators at Babylon, when Cyaxeres took the rule over the Chaldean empire, none being able or willing to dispute the succession, and appointed Nabonadius his viceroy.

Cyaxeres, or Darius, died after a reign of two years, B.C. 551, when Cyrus succeeded him as king of the Medes, who thus were united with the Persians. He was then engaged against the remaining powers that had lately confederated against his uncle. This led him into warfare with Crœsus, king of Lydia, who possessing vast treasures, was enabled to assemble a large army. He was joined by Nabonadius, the ruler of Babylon, who revolted against the Medes. Crœsus was defeated by Cyrus at Thymbria, near Sardis, which city was taken after the battle: this was B.C. 548. Crœsus was spared by the conqueror, and afterwards usually attended him. The story of Cyrus having ordered the captive monarch to be burnt alive is without foundation. Cyrus then turned, first to some revolters in Media, and afterwards successively conquered the remaining confederates, including the Syrians and Arabians, returning at length to Babylon, which was the last state that held out against him. In B.C. 538, he defeated Nabonadius, who took refuge within the walls of Babylon: the strength of that city, with its ability to maintain a siege, has already been noticed. After two years Cyrus took Babylon by stratagem; having made a vast excavation, he turned the waters of the Euphrates into it from above the city; thus the river quickly became fordable. As it was night, Cyrus caused his army to

enter the channel of the river, both above and below the city. The night selected for this attack was one of drunken festivity in Babylon, an annual feast called the Sakea, on which he hoped to find the Babylonians off their guard. These hopes were realized in a manner Cyrus hardly could have expected, for the gates of brass, leading from the river into the city, were left open and unguarded; but this had been expressly prophesied by Isaiah, ch. xlv. 1, long before.

Thus saith the Lord to his anointed,
To Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden,
To subdue nations before him;
And I will loose the loins of kings,
To open before him the two-leaved gates;
And the gates shall not be shut.

The city was entered and taken in the manner so graphically described by the prophet Jeremiah, li. 1—4, 11, 12, 27, 28, 30—32, 57.

Thus saith the Lord;
Behold, I will raise up against Babylon,
And against them that dwell in the midst of them that rise up against me,
A destroying wind;
And will send unto Babylon fanners,
That shall fan her, and shall empty her land:
For in the day of trouble they shall be against her round about.
Against him that bendeth let the archer bend his bow,
And against him that lifteth himself up in his brigandine:
And spare ye not her young men;
Destroy ye utterly all her host.
Thus the slain shall fall in the land of the Chaldeans,
And they that are thrust through in her streets.
Make bright the arrows; gather the shields:
The Lord hath raised up the spirit of the kings of the Medes:
For his device is against Babylon, to destroy it;
Because it is the vengeance of the Lord,
The vengeance of his temple.
Set up the standard upon the walls of Babylon,
Make the watch strong, set up the watchmen,
Prepare the ambushes:

For the Lord hath both devised and done
That which he spake against the inhabitants of Babylon.
  Set ye up a standard in the land,
Blow the trumpet among the nations,
Prepare the nations against her,
Call together against her the kingdoms
Of Ararat, Minni, and Ashchenaz;
Appoint a captain against her;
Cause the horses to come up as the rough caterpillars.
Prepare against her the nations with the kings of the Medes,
The captains thereof, and all the rulers thereof,
And all the land of his dominion.
  The mighty men of Babylon have forborn to fight,
They have remained in their holds:
Their might hath failed;
They became as women:
They have burned her dwelling places;
Her bars are broken.
One post shall run to meet another,
And one messenger to meet another,
To show the king of Babylon
That his city is taken at one end,
And that the passages are stopped,
And the reeds they have burned with fire,
And the men of war are affrighted.
  And I will make drunk her princes, and her wise men,
Her captains, and her rulers, and her mighty men:
And they shall sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake,
Saith the king, whose name is the Lord of hosts.

After having also subdued Egypt, Cyrus lived seven years in tranquillity, residing two months of the year at Ecbatana during the heat of summer, three at Susa, or Shusan, in the spring, and the rest of the year at Babylon. He died in peace, B.C. 529, at the age of seventy. The Persian writer Saadi records the following inscription, which Cyrus, or as he is called by Persian writers Kai-Chosru, caused to be inscribed on his tiara. "What avails a long life spent in the enjoyment of worldly grandeur, since others, mortal like ourselves, will one day trample under foot our pride! This crown, handed down to me from my predecessors, must soon pass in succession upon the heads of many others."

One of the few dates in ancient history, which appears to be clearly ascertained, is that of the taking of Babylon by Cyrus, and the liberation of the Jews, B.C. 536; the first year of his full sovereignty, when Assyria and Babylon as well as Media, Persia, and Western Asia, were brought completely under his rule. One of his earliest acts was issuing the decree which authorized the return of the ancient people of Jehovah. It is given Ezra i. 1—4:

> Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying,
>
> Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

The consent given in this decree, let it be observed, only expressed the rebuilding of the temple; here is no permission to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, nor to reconstruct the city in its former state. Observe, also, that the source from whence this decree originated is expressly set forth: "The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus." It cannot be doubted that Daniel was instrumental in this matter; he probably showed to Cyrus the prophecy of Isaiah which mentioned him by name. At that time Daniel was venerable for his age, and reverenced for his wisdom; which, added to the miraculous circumstances connected with the fall of Belshazzar, and the deliverance of Daniel from the lions, must have inclined a character like Cyrus to listen to his suggestions. The restoration of the Jews would also be

a matter of sound policy, thereby re-peopling a province occupying a very important local position, towards Egypt and the Mediterranean Sea.

In the decree, Cyrus mentions that the Lord God of heaven had charged him to rebuild the temple. This refers to Isaiah xliv. 24—28; xlv. 1—7.

Thus saith the Lord, thy redeemer,
And he that formed thee from the womb,
I am the Lord that maketh all things;
That stretcheth forth the heavens alone;
That spreadeth abroad the earth by myself;
That frustrateth the tokens of the liars,
And maketh diviners mad;
That turneth wise men backward,
And maketh their knowledge foolish;
That confirmeth the word of his servant,
And performeth the counsel of his messengers;
That saith to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be inhabited;
And to the cities of Judah, Ye shall be built,
And I will raise up the decayed places thereof:
That saith to the deep, Be dry,
And I will dry up thy rivers:
That saith of CYRUS, He is my shepherd,
And shall perform all my pleasure:
Even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built;
And to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.
Thus saith the Lord to his anointed,
To Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden,
To subdue nations before him;
And I will loose the loins of kings,
To open before him the two leaved gates;
And the gates shall not be shut;
I will go before thee,
And make the crooked places straight:
I will break in pieces the gates of brass,
And cut in sunder the bars of iron:
And I will give thee the treasures of darkness,
And hidden riches of secret places,
That thou mayest know that I, the Lord,
Which call thee by thy name,
Am the God of Israel.
For Jacob my servant's sake,
And Israel mine elect,
I have even called thee by thy name:
I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me.

I am the Lord, and there is none else,
There is no God beside me:
I girded thee, though thou hast not known me:
That they may know from the rising of the sun,
And from the west, that there is none beside me.
I am the Lord, and there is none else.
I form the light, and create darkness:
I make peace, and create evil:
I the Lord do all these things.

Here is stated the means by which Babylon should be taken; Cyrus, also, is expressly mentioned by name, with his extensive conquests, and the wealth he should obtain. At that time, Sardis and Babylon were the most wealthy cities in the world. Brerewood calculated that the wealth, stated by Pliny to have been taken by Cyrus in Asia, amounted to the vast sum of one hundred and twenty-six millions of pounds sterling. But especially the appeal to Cyrus is to be remarked: "That thou mayest know that I, the Lord, —Which call thee by thy name,—Am the God of Israel." Comparing this prophecy with the success which crowned his undertakings, and the conquests he achieved, Cyrus would feel he had only performed a duty, to which he had been Divinely appointed long before his birth; therefore he was earnest to discharge the duties that still remained to be done. He acknowledges, in his decree, that Jehovah had given him all the kingdoms of the earth. The last verse testifies against the Magian errors, which we shall have to notice in another place.

The question has been asked, Did Cyrus really know and acknowledge Jehovah as the holy Lord and God? There is not quite the same weight of evidence as in the case of Nebuchadnezzar, still there is much to strengthen the supposition, while there is nothing in his character to gainsay it. He was educated in the strict observance of truth; in religion, a worshipper of one God, after a system derived from the patriarchs; he obeyed the commands of the Most High to let his people go free; and died with many

circumstances which, resting upon the accounts of heathen writers, may be supposed not to be clearly given, yet which indicate a humility of spirit, very different from that of the generality of heathen conquerors. He directed that his body should not be deposited in gold or silver, nor any sumptuous monument reared for him; but that his remains should be committed to the ground without delay. He was buried at Passagardœ, in Persia, where Alexander visited his tomb, and, after offering funeral honours, caused it to be opened. The mighty conqueror found not the treasures he expected, but only a shield, two bows, and a scymitar, with the inscription, "O man, whoever thou art, and whenever thou comest, for come I know thou wilt, I am Cyrus, the founder of the Persian empire. Envy me not the little earth that covers my body." How should Cyrus know of the coming of Alexander? Hales replies, "Very easily, by Daniel having communicated to him the vision of the goat, and that respecting the mighty king," Dan xi. 1—4. How remarkable, that Nebuchadnezzar, the powerful lord who led the Jews into captivity, and Cyrus, the mighty conqueror who decreed their return, should both be brought to acknowledge the sovereignty of JEHOVAH, and that there should be reason to believe they found peace at the last! Truly, the Lord is the rewarder of those employed as his instruments, who acknowledge HIM as the Author of their success, and that they were raised up only to perform his pleasure. It is important to consider, that all the nations that aided in the captivity and dispersion of the Jews, at this period, and five hundred years later, have perished from the earth; others have taken their place. But it is not so with the Persians, that government still remains a kingly power to the present day; the Persians were the restorers of the Jews to their own land!

CHAPTER XI.

THE RETURN OF THE FIRST DIVISION OF THE JEWS TO THEIR OWN LAND, UNDER ZERUBBABEL—THE FOUNDATION OF THE TEMPLE LAID.

THE Lord not only inclined the heart of Cyrus to let his people go free, but also inclined a number of the people to accept the offered deliverance. This was by Divine interposition, for the land of Judah then offered small inducement to return and settle there. The inclination to remain in Chaldea, would be promoted by the favour then possessed by Daniel, and the power, court favour, and luxuries enjoyed by the more wealthy among the Jews. The leading forth the children of Israel from Babylon may be considered, in some respects, more remarkable as a manifestation of Divine power over the hearts of men, than their going forth from Egypt. Josephus speaks of the ten tribes as remaining beyond the Euphrates, and as so exceedingly increased in his day, that their numbers could hardly be computed. This, doubtless, was overruled for good at the time; and thus witnesses to the truth of Scripture prophecy, keeping up the expectation of a Saviour, were diffused among the nations of the East. The book of Esther shows, that the Jews were numerous throughout the empire, and that "many of the people of the land became Jews," Esth. viii. 17. But where are they now? Some districts are yet inhabited by Jews, though in an ignorant and degraded state, as recent travellers relate; but many have become incorporated with the nations around them. This, and the continually falling away of the Jews in Europe to the people among whom they dwell, tend to show how clearly it is by the order-

TRAVELLING IN AN EASTERN DESERT.

ing of the Divine will, that Israel still "dwells alone as a nation among the nations;" nothing but that keeps them from the fate which their conquerors have experienced, of being lost among other nations, and from being altogether "mingled among the heathen and learning their works," Psa. cvi. 35.

The Jews themselves have a proverbial saying, that only "the bran returned to Jerusalem, while the fine flour remained at Babylon." How often is it to be lamented, that those best able to forward the work of the Lord are the least willing to engage in his service! Of the twenty-four courses of the priests, only four returned to Jerusalem. Yet there were many Jews who would use the words of Psalm cxlvii. 1—3:

Praise ye the Lord:
For it is good to sing praises unto our God;
For it is pleasant; and praise is comely.
The Lord doth build up Jerusalem:
He gathereth together the outcasts of Israel.
He healeth the broken in heart,
And bindeth up their wounds.

Among them were some of all ranks, including the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin; but it is evident they were not in possession of much of this world's goods, for about fifty thousand people had only about fourteen hundred horses, mules, and camels, with six thousand seven hundred and twenty asses; and much of the little that they carried from Babylon was the freewill offering of those about them.

The return from captivity was by degrees; there were two principal divisions, but many would also return in small companies. The list of those who formed the first company is given in Ezra ii. It was led by Zerubbabel, the son of Sealthiel, the son of Jeconiah. This prince of the royal blood is called by his Babylonian name, Shashbazzar, in the book of Ezra; but his Jewish name is recorded in Haggai and Zechariah. Cyrus appointed him to be the leader, and restored to him the vessels of precious metals which

had been taken from the temple. These amounted to five thousand four hundred. That they should have been preserved through so many years was wonderful, considering the different monarchs who successively had power over them; especially, when

> The king was on his throne,
> The satraps thronged the hall;
> A thousand bright lamps shone
> O'er that high festival.
>
> A thousand cups of gold,
> In Judah deemed Divine
> Jehovah's vessels, hold
> The godless heathen's wine!

That these vessels should now be restored was still more wonderful; but it literally fulfilled the promise by Jeremiah, xxvii. 21, 22:

> Yea, thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, concerning the vessels that remain in the house of the Lord, and in the house of the king of Judah and of Jerusalem; They shall be carried to Babylon, and there shall they be until the day that I visit them, saith the Lord; then will I bring them up, and restore them to this place.

The numbers of the people recorded by Ezra and by Nehemiah do not quite agree; they differ in some particulars, of which sufficient explanations have been given, but we need not enter into the details. The total was about fifty thousand, and there is reason to consider that those whose families are named were of the tribes of Benjamin and Judah, but that the remainder included in the total were of the ten tribes, who had gone earlier into captivity, and respecting whom a minute record was not made.

From this period to the close of the sacred history, there is no certain and separate account of the ten tribes; but their existence as a separate people, and their re-appearance as such, is still believed and looked for by many.

No particulars are given of the route of the Jews, or

the occurrences by the way, nor of their entrance into the land of their fathers. On whatever side they entered they would pass over mountain boundaries, from whence views would open of spots well known to them as celebrated in the history of old times. In some part of their route they would probably see the broad plain of Esdraelon, stretching towards the setting sun: that plain would recal the memory of the triumphs of Deborah; and they would be strengthened by recollecting how the Lord delivered Sisera to fall by the hand of a woman. The scene of the triumph of Gideon, and that of the last fatal battle of Saul, would be before them; but especially would they look for the locality where the good Josiah fell, as related by the singers of Israel in their lamentations, which had been made an ordinance in Israel, and would now recur to every returning captive.

The Jews that went up with Zerubbabel were those whose spirit God raised to go up to build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem, though many would disperse to their cities and family inheritances. But the work of erecting the temple was begun immediately on their arrival, when they gave according to their ability. The people soon were gathered, "as one man," to Jerusalem. Being well aware that the Lord their God dwelt not in ceiled houses, and that magnificent structures were not indispensable for worshipping him, though suitable, and required in that dispensation of types and figures, their first proceeding was to construct the altar for burnt offerings in the inner court of the temple, on the same spot where it stood before the destruction of that building. Upon this the priests from that time offered the daily sacrifices, the continual burnt offerings, and the sacrifices on the festivals, beginning with those of the Feast of Tabernacles. It was very appropriate to the situation in which they were then placed, just returned as strangers from the land where they had sojourned as captives, and having no permanent dwellings.

THE BUILDING OF BOOTHS FOR THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES.

The younger part of those who returned to the land of their forefathers would view the sacrifices with deep interest; often had they heard them described; but words cannot adequately describe visible objects. We know the natural bent of the youthful mind for inquiry: the reasons why the sacrifices were offered, and the meaning of the various ceremonies, would continually be demanded. This would lead to narratives of what God had done for his people of old, and of the circumstances under which their rites and ceremonies were ordained. But there would be some among the congregation who could give further insight into the meaning of these typical observances; who would explain how they referred to the atonement of sin, and the promised Saviour. To enter into this subject here would lead us too far from our narrative, the reader will find it fully considered in "*The Rites and Worship of the Jews.*"

The people were not negligent in putting forward the other parts of the great work before them. Money was sent to the artificers of Tyre and Sidon, that materials for the temple might be prepared; especially that cedar trees might be procured from Lebanon, agreeably to the grant from Cyrus.

To this period, Psalm cvii. is assigned, in which various cases of deliverance are beautifully described. The captives led through a wilderness, when hungry and thirsty their souls fainted in them, and brought to a pleasant land; the prisoner fast bound in affliction and iron, liberated from his dungeon; the sufferer apparently drawing near to the gates of death, raised from the bed of sickness and healed; the mariners preserved on the stormy deep, where "all their wisdom is swallowed up," (marginal reading;) each and all are urged to praise the Lord for his goodness, for his wonderful works towards the children of men, and assured that

Whoso is wise, and will observe these things,
Even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord.

Other Psalms (87, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 125, 126, 128, 134) are considered to be applicable to this period, several of them appear to refer to the erection of the second temple; but especially Psalm 126 has reference to the state of the Jews at that time.

Early in the second year of the return of the Jews, in the second month, their preparations were sufficiently advanced for laying the foundations of the buildings of the temple: this was done with all the solemn ceremonial in their power. It was fifty-one years after the destruction of the first temple, Ezra iii. 10—13;

And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the Lord, after the ordinance of David king of Israel. And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the

Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. But many of the priests and Levites, and chief of

the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy: so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.

Their grief would also proceed from the affection with which the memory of the aged clings to the objects and scenes of youth, which have long since gone by: present occasions of joy appear to them small in comparison; and the remembrance of painful scenes, such as they have passed through, will affect the mind; the recalling hours of past sorrow will embitter the present moment. The "noise of the weeping" may appear to us a singular expression; but those who have heard the loud sounds or cries with which weeping and lamentations are accompanied in the East, notice this, and also that men as well as women publicly join in these lamentations.

They wept, those aged patriots wept
  The fame of vanquished years;
And burning thoughts, which long had slept,
  Now melted them to tears.
They well remembered Salem's state
E're Babel laid it desolate.

They saw the second temple rise,
  But far less fair and bright;
And e'en their age-enfrozen eyes,
  Dropt sorrow at the sight;
They thought of many a vanished scene
Of what they were, and what had been.

Captivity had been their lot
  For many a lonely day;
Yet Salem cannot be forgot,
  Or memory pass away:
And memory told the tale too well,
For which their bitter tear-drops fell.

They should have looked with greater thankfulness

at the prospect before their children. They were brought back to the very spot on which they had formerly seen the tower of the temple rising above its courts. The dimensions for the buildings were the same, the site was enlarged, and although the materials collected were much fewer, and there was no immediate prospect of the same display of sculptured gold and ornamented brass, yet there were no reasons to limit the Most High. In the course of years the temple again offered a rich display of magnificence.

Psalms lxxxiv. and lxvi. are ascribed to this period; they are appropriate to the work then going forward: they express gratitude for deliverance, with earnest desires that the Lord should be glorified. Such feelings are right, such prayers will be answered; many a believer has been able to adopt the words of the Psalmist, "Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me."

And the deliverance of the Jews from their captivity in Babylon should remind us, that the calls and offers of the gospel are "deliverance preached to the captives," even like the proclamation of Cyrus. One infinitely greater than Cyrus, even the Lord Jesus Christ, has opened a way whereby every one who feels the burden and bondage of sin may return unto God, and be made partaker of the glorious liberty of his children. Christ, as the Son of God, has "all power both in heaven and in earth," an infinitely greater dominion than that of Cyrus; he invites all to come to him, yet, alas, many who hear this joyful sound choose rather to sit still in Babylon. They love its worldly pomp and power, they are in love with their sins; but those whom the Lord has made willing in the day of his power, will not remain with those who shall perish in Babylon, when the day of its destruction shall arrive.

Building the Temple.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE HINDERED—THE SAMARITANS.

THOSE engaged in the work of the Lord must not expect to escape difficulties, the causes for which are often hidden from them at the time, but sorely try their faith. When believers are proceeding in a good work, and are not conscious of unhallowed or interested motives, it seems hard for them to meet with a check, and to find their way become rugged, or even for a time hedged up; yet this is often the case: it is well for us to consider and try our ways, and to wait upon the Lord, seeking that his will may be made clear unto us. Such a time now came upon the Jews. About this period Daniel departed this life, full of

days; his removal would make it easier for the adversaries of the Jews to oppose their progress, and they would not neglect to use the advantage. Observe, here, that the first hinderance to the work of building the temple arose from men who pretended to desire the glory of God, and offered to take a part in the building of the temple. These were the colonists planted in the country of the ten tribes by Esarhaddon, and there incorporated with the scanty remnant of the people. From 2 Kings xvii. it appears, that they acknowledged Jehovah, but worshipped the Lord in conjunction with idols; this mongrel worship having been adopted from unworthy motives. "The Lord is a jealous God;" such service never will be accepted by him; his servants are to be as cautious in refraining from uniting themselves with such worshippers, as in keeping separate from the openly profane and worldly. We refer not to common affairs of life, or outward matters, but to things which especially concern the spiritual service of the Lord, and the honour due to him. In these things there cannot be any agreement or concord between Christ and Belial: if assistance is offered in such matters, let it not be accepted without due consideration; many a time has aid been profferred, which in the intention, or at least in the result, would weaken instead of promoting the work in hand. An influence or a direct control has been thereby obtained, and unhesitatingly used to prevent the progress of measures calculated for the good of souls; sometimes even to turn aside for a time the object originally designed. Such evidently was the motive with which the Samaritans, designated by Ezra as the enemies of Judah and Benjamin, desired to build with them, declaring that they sought their God, and did sacrifice to him. These heathens were placed in the most advantageous situation, in which heathens could be placed for being reclaimed from idolatry; yet they did not learn from experience, and the outward circumstances around them, the folly of associating the

worship of idols with that of Jehovah. And what grounds have we for supposing that it is otherwise with those around us, who have not fully and unreservedly shown themselves to be followers of Christ? Ought not our conduct to resemble that of the Jews in the days of Zerubbabel and Nehemiah, by refusing to unite as fellow labourers, with those upon whom we cannot depend as the people of the Lord, if they require that concessions should be made, or advantages offered in return for their aid.

The Jews refused these offers of assistance, and desires for an unhallowed union. Their leaders answered, "Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God, but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us." Then the Samaritans showed of what spirit they were; they sought to hinder that which they allowed to be a good work, because they were not admitted to exercise an influence therein. They hired counsellors against the Jews, to frustrate their purpose; by bribes and influence at court they found means to trouble them in building. They sought to hinder their progress, by indirect, rather than by direct means, during the short remainder of the reign of Cyrus. And as we generally find motives of worldly interest combining with dislike to true religion, in actuating the enemies of the gospel, so now it is probable that the Samaritans were the more stirred up to oppose the Jews, from the tribute they paid to the king being assigned by him for the purpose of building the temple, and maintaining the sacrifices. The 129th Psalm is thought to express the feelings of sorrow, and also of hope, which affected the Jewish leaders under this disappointment.

Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth,
May Israel now say:
Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth:
Yet they have not prevailed against me.
The plowers plowed upon my back:

They made long their furrows.
The Lord is righteous:
He hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked.
  Let them all be confounded and turned back
That hate Zion.
Let them be as grass upon the housetops,
Which withereth afore it groweth up:
Wherewith the mower filleth not his hands;
Nor he that bindeth sheaves his bosom.
Neither do they that go by say,
The blessing of the Lord be upon you:
We bless you in the name of the Lord.

Looking at the peculiar situation of the Jews at this time, abundant reason for the refusal of this aid is seen. Their nation had just been suffering the bitter penalty denounced on their associating with idolaters; they would not now, at the very outset of their course, allow idolaters to join with them in their worship. For these idolaters did not admit that they were wrong, renouncing their errors; but, on the contrary, maintained that they sought the Lord Jehovah, even as the Jews did. The Jews had willingly availed themselves of the bountiful aid afforded by Cyrus, of the freewill offerings of those around them in the land of their captivity, also of the direct personal services of the men of Tyre and Sidon, in supplying means and materials for constructing the house of the Lord, and re-establishing his services: but the aid of the Samaritans, and the design with which it was proffered, was widely different; it was intended to break down the barrier between truth and falsehood.

Zerubbabel, and the chiefs of the people, made their stand, and left the result with the Lord, who overruled all for good. The building was delayed for a time; but this only checked the perhaps too eager expectations of the people, while it prevented the recognized and open interference of the idolaters, who afterwards sought to hinder the reformation of Nehemiah, and probably would have led to a gradual relapse into idolatry. It is true, that from thence grew

that bitter hatred of the Jews towards the Samaritans, which would not allow a Jew to have any dealings with a Samaritan, and made the villagers of that land oppose the passage of Christ and his disciples, because their faces were as though they went to Jerusalem. Our blessed Lord censured this bitter and persecuting spirit, and reproved it in both nations by his words and his actions: yet even from this enmity good was produced. Graves has shown the important purposes to which this mutual rejection was made subservient. The intermixture of the Jews with the Samaritans might have rendered the accomplishment of the prophecies respecting the family and birth of the Messiah less clear, and in various ways have interfered with the Jews remaining a separate people; while, in consequence of this mutual opposition, the Jews were made more watchful to preserve the strictness of the Mosaic ritual, and the Samaritans were zealous in imitating it. Each preserved the Divine writings of the Pentateuch independently of the other, and could not be suspected of any collusion as to the purity of the text.

Another and a very important distinction may be noticed as to different views of the Saviour. While the Jews were blinded by their expectations of a worldly king, and therefore obstinately refused to regard Jesus as the promised Messiah, the Samaritans formed a more correct estimate. They knew, that "when the Messiah cometh, he will tell us all things:" see John iv. 24. Many among them accounted ignorant were not looking for a temporal prince, which the Messiah was not; but for a religious instructor, which he was. When our Lord visited Samaria, preaching the word, reproving sin, and setting forth the way of salvation, "many believed because of his own word," declared their belief in him, and that they knew that this was indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world. They rightly estimated his character, and listened to him, without desiring, like the Jews, to take him by force, and make him a king, when they were

more than commonly impressed by his word and miracles.

Remember in what form our Lord appeared among the Samaritans, a mere wayfaring man, a foot traveller; who, wearied with his journey, as such a one, sat

by a well side which is still pointed out, with a few companions equally humble in appearance. This also was before his fame was noised abroad, before he was known through the length and breadth of the land for his miraculous cures. Under these circumstances the Samaritans acknowledged him as the Christ, the Saviour of the world; but the only time we find the Jewish multitude openly calling him the Son of David, was when he took upon him some degree of state, humble indeed, but still with something of the bearing of a king, and drew the public notice by the manner of his entrance into Jerusalem. The crowds then shouted, "Hosanna!" but, in a few short days, when they saw him despised and rejected by their rulers, the

same voices cried aloud, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" These remarks are important, as they bring before us the proceedings of the Jews at this peculiar crisis, and afford instructive lessons for the present day. It is not easy, always, to draw the line of demarcation between the followers of Christ and the votaries of the world; but to Scripture we may refer on all occasions of doubt, and we shall find instruction there. Let us remember, that "the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth," John iv. 23, 24. The whole of this narrative should be studied by us, with earnest prayer for right discernment in all things; and let us be assured that all the devices of man to hinder the work of God shall fail.

Behold the temple of the Lord!
The work of God, by man abhorred,
  Appearing fair and splendid;
It lifts its head in spite of foes,
And though a hostile world oppose,
  The work will yet be ended.

A building this, not made with hands;
On firm foundations, lo! it stands,
  For God himself has laid them:
The workmanship of God alone;
The rich materials all his own,
  'Twas he himself that made them.

He builds it for his glory's sake;
Its solid frame no force can shake;
  However men despise it:
And time, that other work destroys,
'Gainst this in vain its power employs,
  The work of God defies it.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LAST VISION OF DANIEL—HIS DEATH—CAMBYSES —DARIUS HYSTASPES.

DANIEL did not return to Palestine after the captivity. His great age, and the station he held at the Persian court, sufficiently account for this. He must have been about ninety years old. His influence at court, however, was not sufficient to prevent the enemies of the Jews from staying the building of the temple; but that event seems to have called him to exercise "the powerful weapon," as Bunyan calls it, "all prayer." This painful interference might lead him to the solemn exercises of devotion, recorded Dan. x. 2, 3: "In those days I Daniel was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled."

A most solemn and remarkable revelation was then made to him. He was on the banks of the river Hiddekel, now called the Tigris, which shows that he was then residing at Susa, when the Lord Jesus Christ personally revealed himself to the prophet, in human form, clad in white linen, as the high priest on the solemn day of atonement. His form and appearance were radiant with glory: those with Daniel saw not this appearance, but an awful sense of the Divine presence was upon them; they trembled and fled.

Then an angel encouraged him. Daniel was spoken to as a man "greatly beloved;" and a revelation was made to him of "that which is noted in the Scripture of truth." A solemn prophecy was communicated, not in vision, or in symbolic imagery, but in explicit terms, as to what should come to pass, though without

mention of names, or specific statements of dates. This prophecy occupies Daniel xi. It may be considered as divisible into four parts. The first relates to the overthrow of the Persian empire by Alexander, with the division of his empire, verses 2—4. The second details, with remarkable minuteness, the succession, intermarriages, and wars of the kings of Syria and Egypt, and notes that vile character Antiochus Epiphanes, verses 5—30. These kingdoms were ended by the Romans, whose conquests are noticed in the third place, and their putting an end to the daily sacrifice by the destruction of Jerusalem, verses 30—34. From that period the prophecy passes on to notice, in the fourth place, the anti-christian proceedings of the wilful king. This probably extends to times yet to come, and it seems plainly to relate to the same awful series of events to come to pass in the latter days, which are recorded in the Apocalypse, and in the prophecies of Ezekiel, respecting Gog. With reference to these events, we must be content to remain in ignorance, not fixing our attention upon them so as to allow our present efforts for good, or the discharge of our personal or relative duties, to be in the least weakened or impeded.

The prophetic communications to Daniel closed with what is recorded ch. xii., a solemn declaration of the coming of the Son of man, the blessed Saviour, and of the awful events by which it should be accompanied, see verses 1—3:

> And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.

In conclusion, three periods are mentioned as indicating the time when the course of events marked out in these prophecies should be finished. Many volumes have been written upon these periods, and probably many more will be written upon them before the whole course of events to which these visions refer have passed; but, after all, at present we can only safely conclude, as Bishop Newton did a century ago, "There are three different periods, and what is the precise time of their beginning, and consequently of their ending, as well as what are the great and signal events which will take place at the end of each period, we can only conjecture; time alone can with certainty discover."* Let us be thankful that similar clouds and darkness do not rest upon and obscure to us the scriptural doctrines and precepts which concern the salvation of our souls. And remember that the object of prophecy is not to gratify the curiosity of man, but to make known the Spirit of Jesus as the Spirit of prophecy, and to convince us that there is a Divine Providence as well as a Divine revelation, a God that directs and orders all the transactions of the world, and that this God, "who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake unto our fathers by the prophets, hath in these last times spoken unto us by his Son." The same assurance of mercy and glory which was given to the prophet, is given to every believer in this and in other ages, ver. 13: "Go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days."

* If the reader wishes for further particulars as to the views generally entertained by commentators, respecting the great prophetic periods to which the prophet Daniel and the apostle John refer, he will find them in the Commentary published by the Religious Tract Society. Whether the number of "days" spoken of, is to be considered literally, as common days, or as expressing in prophetic language, days for years, is a question which is warmly debated: the majority of commentators incline to the latter opinion.

A PERSIAN KING ON HIS THRONE.
(RESTORED FROM THE SCULPTURES AT PERSEPOLIS.)

No particulars of the last hours of Daniel are recorded; we cannot but remark how few accounts of this nature are given in Scripture, even concerning the most important characters of holy writ: surely this might teach many who write obituaries, that it is far more important to relate how a man lived, than merely to tell what passed in his closing hours. The particulars related of Daniel afford very important precepts and examples, nor is there occasion to enlarge upon his character. Enough is told us in the book that bears his name, and in the remarkable testimony of God the Holy Spirit, who, speaking by the prophet Ezekiel, expressly unites Daniel with Job and with Noah, as pre-eminently righteous men, Ezek. xiv. 14. And when reproving the prince of Tyre, whose heart was lifted up, so as to imagine himself a God, the prophet speaks of him in bitter irony, as "wiser than Daniel," Ezek. xxviii. 3; evidently implying that, in his own conceit, he was wiser than the man possessing more wisdom than any other then alive.

The coincidence as to the time of the death of the prophet Daniel, with the staying of the building of the temple is clear; how far the one event might be connected with the other, we cannot now fully ascertain. This suspension of the work continued not only during the latter years of Cyrus, but also through the following reign, and the changes that ensued.

Cyrus died B.C. 529, appointing Cambyses, his eldest son, to be his successor, to rule over nearly the whole of his dominions. He was a tyrannical and cruel prince. In the fourth year of his reign he invaded Egypt, which country had endeavoured to shake off the domination of Persia. Egypt was soon subdued and ravaged, and the reigning monarch put to death; but Cambyses vainly attempted farther conquests. One division of his army, sent to plunder the riches of the temple of Jupiter Ammon, situated in a fertile spot, one of the oases in the sandy desert

to the west of Egypt, perished in the moving sands of that desolate region, when fifty thousand men were overwhelmed. This scene of horror and confusion is described by a poet :

Onward resistless rolls the infuriate surge,
Clouds follow clouds, and mountains mountains urge;
Wave over wave the driving desert swims,
Bursts o'er their heads, inhumes their struggling limbs;
Man mounts on man, on camels camels rush,
Hosts march o'er hosts, and nations nations crush;
Wheeling in air the winged islands fall,
And one great earthly ocean covers all!
Then ceased the storm—awhile the living hill
Heaved with convulsive throes—and all was still!

Bruce and Lyon have described the horrors of sand storms, and of the moving pillars of sand in that region, before which all the plans and arrangements of man, however powerful, however skilful, are as nothing, and less than nothing : their descriptions are very impressive. Bruce says the swiftest horse could not escape from their rapid approach. On one occasion they began immediately after sunrise, and appeared like a thick wood. The rays of the sun shining through them for near an hour, gave them the appearance of pillars of fire. He adds, "Our people now became desperate. The Greeks shrieked out, and said it was the day of judgment. Ismael, a Turk, pronounced it to be hell; and the Turcorories, that the world was on fire." He says they left an impression upon his mind, to which he could give no name.

The main army of Cambyses, led by himself to the south, against the Ethiopians, nearly perished with hunger; a part having been selected by lot, and sacrificed to feed the survivors. This brings us to B.C. 524. These scenes of horror seem to have deprived Cambyses of his reason, A series of extravagant and horrible cruelties were committed by him, which cannot be otherwise accounted for. The first and least was his mortally wounding the sacred bull Apis, worship-

ped by the Egyptians, insulting the priests of this false divinity. This animal god is thought to be alluded to in Jeremiah, xlvi. 15, which the Greek version renders, "Why did Apis flee from thee? Thy chosen bull, why did not he stand? Because the Lord made him weak, and thy multitude was weak and fell." Cambyses ordered many Persians to be put to death without cause; among whom was his brother Smerdis. He took two of his sisters to be his wives, one of whom he killed, and he committed a variety of other cruel and extravagant actions.

In Persia, one of the Magi personated the murdered Smerdis, and assumed the sovereignty. Cambyses hastened homewards to crush the pretender, but while on his march, was mortally wounded by his scymitar in mounting his horse, and died at Ecbatana, a small town in Syria, not the capital of Media.

The usurper did not reign more than about half a year. He was slain by seven conspirators of noble rank, one of whom, Darius Hystaspes, succeeded to the empire by agreement with his confederates, who became chief princes of the empire. Soon after his accession the Babylonians revolted; but the city was captured, after being besieged for a year and a half, when it was taken by a stratagem. Zopyrus, having pretended to join the Babylonians in revenge against Darius, betrayed the city to his master. The proud city of Babylon suffered much at this period; in consequence of its revolt, the walls were considerably lowered. Previous to this siege the Jews had been warned to flee from Babylon, Zech. ii. 6—7:

Flee from the land of the north, saith the Lord:
For I have spread you abroad
As the four winds of the heaven, saith the Lord.
Deliver thyself, O Zion,
That dwellest with the daughter of Babylon.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE RESUMED—THE PROPHECIES OF HAGGAI—THE EARLY PROPHECIES OF ZECHARIAH.

In the second year of Darius Hystaspes the work of building the temple at Jerusalem was resumed. This great work had been at a stand for more than ten years, the people having sunk into a state of apathy, so as to neglect the rebuilding of the temple, though they improved their own habitations, and now dwelt in "ceiled houses," buildings more elegantly finished, and more completely fitted than those constructed on their first arrival. But the Lord will not allow his people to remain careless, when it is time for them to be up, and to be doing. They rebuilt on the site the city had formerly occupied, which is still partly covered by modern Jerusalem, the mosque of Omar being on the spot where the temple stood.

It is recorded that the Jews were aroused in the first instance by a dispensation of Providence. The harvest and vintage failed. Prophets were raised up to declare the will of the Lord. This was B.C. 520. Haggai then called upon them, ch. i. 5—8:

> Consider your ways,
> Ye have sown much—and bring in little;
> Ye eat—but ye have not enough;
> Ye drink—but ye are not filled with drink;
> Ye clothe you—but there is none warm;
> And he that earneth wages—earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.
> Thus saith the Lord of hosts;
> Consider your ways.
> Go up to the mountain, and bring wood,
> And build the house; and I will take pleasure in it,
> And I will be glorified, saith the Lord.

MODERN JERUSALEM, SHOWING WHERE THE TEMPLE FORMERLY STOOD.

The cause of their present affliction was stated.

> Because of mine house that is waste,
> And ye run every man unto his own house.

This was the first outpouring of the prophetic spirit in Jerusalem, since the return from captivity. As such it excited instant attention. Zerubbabel the prince, and Joshua the high priest, arose with the people, and the work again went forward. To encourage them, a remarkable prophecy was sent by Haggai, which reconciled them to proceed with the work, in the use of such means as the Lord saw fit to place at their disposal. It is thus paraphrased by a poet,

> Whose is the gold that glitters in the mine?
> And whose the silver? Are they not the Lord's?
> And lo! the cattle on a thousand hills,
> And the broad earth with all her gushing springs,
> Are they not His who made them?
> O man! whose wrinkling labour is for heirs
> Thou knowest not who, thou in thy mouldering bed
> Umnourned, unchronicled of them shalt sleep;
> Nor will they thank thee that thou didst bereave
> Thy soul of good for them. Now thou mayest give
> The famished, food; the prisoner, liberty;
> Light to the darkened mind; to the lost soul,
> A place in heaven. Take thou the privilege
> With solemn gratitude. Speak as thou art
> Upon earth's surface, gloriously exult
> To be co-worker with the King of heaven.

Not only were the Jews reminded that the silver and the gold were the Lord's, it was promised that the glories of this house, though meanly thought of by them, should be greater than those of Solomon's temple, Haggai ii. 7—9:

> And I will shake all nations,
> And the desire of all nations shall come:
> And I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts.
> The silver is mine, and the gold is mine,
> Saith the Lord of hosts.
> The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former,
> Saith the Lord of hosts:

And in this place will I give peace,
Saith the Lord of hosts.

There can be no doubt of the direct reference here made to the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Desire of all nations, evidently in connexion with the promise to Abraham—that in his seed all nations should be blessed, Gen. xxii. 18.

The Jews enumerated five things in which this second temple was inferior to the first. The Shechinah, the ark of the covenant, Urim and Thummin, fire that came from heaven, and the Spirit of prophecy. These were glorious marks of the Divine favour; but they were all more than supplied by the presence of Him, in whom was the substance of all the excellences, of which these things had been but the types and shadows.

Haggai was not called to prophesy alone at this important juncture; Zechariah was raised up to speak still more fully of coming events. He began by an earnest exhortation to repentance, with a solemn reference to past times, Zech. i. 5, 6;

Your fathers, where are they?
And the prophets, do they live for ever?
But my words and my statutes,
Which I commanded my servants the prophets,
Did they not take hold of your fathers?
And they returned and said,
Like as the Lord of hosts thought to do unto us,
According to our ways, and according to our doings,
So hath he dealt with us.

This presents a subject for serious inquiry; Where are OUR fathers? where are the prophets that preached to them? We inhabit the same country, perhaps the same towns, even the same houses; we pass along the same streets, trade in the same marts, till the same fields, worship beneath the same roofs; our life is spent on the same spots, and similar to theirs, excepting in some mere changes of outward circumstances. But WHERE ARE THEY? When they died, there was not

an end to them; they are in ETERNITY, the unchangeable world of spirits. We hasten thither also. Those of them who lived and died in sin, where are they? in torment! We are warned that we come not to the same place of torment, Luke xvi. 28, 29. Those of them who lived and died in Christ, they are in a state of happiness; do not we desire to be there also? And the prophets are gone! What is the account they have had to give of their office? Did they remember that they were dying men, dealing with dying people about their immortal souls? Were they, like the apostle of the Gentiles, determined to know nothing among their people save Christ Jesus, and him crucified? Did they set forth nothing, so as to weaken the attention of their people to the great truth, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners? Well was it for them *then*, well is it for them *now*, if they sought not to build wood, hay, and stubble on this foundation, teaching for doctrines of truth, the figments and commandments of men! Happy the people who had such ministers, if they listened to them; justly are those sufferers now, who then rejected this message to their own condemnation, There is another world where we and our prophets shall live for ever. Ought it not to be our great care in this world, to prepare for that which is to come? Turn ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings; hear the Lord, and hearken to his words.

If the solemn message of the prophet has, in substance, been thus improved for our consideration, by one of our own scriptural writers, with how much more force would the inquiry come home to the Jews, when called to look around the streets arising on the ruins of their fathers' habitations, and summoned to assist in re-constructing that temple, the neglect of which had been one cause of the ruin of their ancestors. "Your fathers, where are they?"

Haggai and Zechariah prophesied together. The former reminded the people of their late sufferings

from scarcity, and promised a blessing. A message of encouragement was also sent to Zerubbabel the ruler, assuring him that, amidst all the changes of the nations, he should be preserved of the Lord. These changes were made known to Zechariah by the vision of horsemen, and of workmen, commissioned to destroy the horns, or power, of the Gentiles. And an express declaration was given of the increase and peopling of Jerusalem, which extends even to that time when the Lord "shall choose Jerusalem again."

The taking away the sins and guilt of the Jews was represented in a vision. The high priest stood before the Lord, clothed in filthy garments; guilt and corruption are our great discouragements in the Divine presence. He was accused. Satan, the adversary, "the accuser of the brethren," is ever ready to testify against even the most eminent saints. Who then should wonder at meeting with discouragements and difficulties? Those who belong to Christ, have him, as represented here, ever ready to plead for them; and every one, like the Jewish high priest of that day, is but "a brand plucked out of the fire," Zech. iii. 2. This may specially refer to some past offence of the high priest in the service of the Lord, but it is applicable to all believers in every age: all need to have their iniquity caused to pass away, and to be clothed with the righteousness of Christ.

This spotless robe the same appears,
When ruined nature sinks in years;
No age can change its glorious hue,
The robe of Christ is ever new.

To Joshua, thus cleansed and justified, was addressed another prophecy, one of the remarkable predictions of Christ in the Old Testament, under the title of "The Branch;" a title already given to the Messiah by Isaiah and Jeremiah. Success in the building of the temple, with the strengthening of Zerubbabel, and his united efforts with Joshua, were

expressly foretold. As this prophecy was speedily accomplished, it would encourage reliance on the message sent by the prophet, respecting the greater events to come; and it gave emphasis to the words, "Who hath despised the day of small things?" Solemn warnings of judgments against sin are given, ch. v., followed by notice of the changes about to come upon the surrounding nations, ch. vi.

Another prophecy was delivered upon an occasion which attracted the notice of the people. Some Jews came from Babylon with valuable offerings for the temple, thus showing their faith that the work of the Lord would go forward. The names of these messengers are recorded, Hildai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah; they were faithful in executing their charge. Zechariah was directed to meet them, and cause crowns to be made from their silver and gold, to be set upon the head of Joshua. This was to be done with special reference to Him whose name is "The Branch;" and the crowns were to remain in the temple, a memorial of the prophecy of Him who should be the Ruler and Builder of a more glorious temple, to which those afar off, even the Gentiles, should come, and join in the work and worship of Jehovah. Zech. vi. 12, 13;

> Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH;
> And he shall grow up out of his place,
> And he shall build the temple of the Lord:
> Even he shall build the temple of the Lord;
> And he shall bear the glory,
> And shall sit and rule upon his throne;
> And he shall be a priest upon his throne:
> And the counsel of peace shall be between them both.

This prophecy remarkably shows how determinately the Jews resisted the revealed will of God, in their views respecting the Messiah, in their rejection of Christ, and those who believe in him.

Their resuming the work of building the temple, drew the attention of the provincial rulers, who in-

quired under what authority the Jews proceeded. They were referred to the decree of Cyrus, Ezra i. Tatnai, who was the chief governor of Syria and Palestine, being a man of temper and justice, did not interfere in a harsh or hasty manner, but applied for directions. He stated the case fairly, and requested Darius to cause the records to be searched, when, after a fruitless search in the record office at Babylon, the enrolled decree of Cyrus was found at Ecbatana, in Media, Ezra vi. 2.

The work then was not only allowed to proceed, it was encouraged by another decree, ordering the governors to supply the cost of the sacrifices "from the king's goods, even of the tribute." Darius was anxious to support the memory of Cyrus, whose daughter he had married, by forwarding all his plans, and further decreed that all who opposed this great work of the rebuilding the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, should have his own house pulled down, and be put to death, Ezra vi. 11. The decree of Darius concludes with a remarkable acknowledgment of the almighty power of the God of Israel, "The God that hath caused his name to dwell there destroy all kings and people, that shall put to their hand to alter and to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem," ver. 12. These edicts appear to be official copies, and thus are specimens of ancient decrees.

The work of rebuilding the temple went forward successfully, and the Jewish state may be considered as restored from this time. To this event the 138th Psalm, and some others, are supposed to refer; the words in ver. 6, 8, seem to have especial force, when taken in connexion with these events.

Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly:
But the proud he knoweth afar off.
The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me:
Thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever:
Forsake not the works of thine own hands.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BUILDING OF JERUSALEM—THE TEMPLE FINISHED—THE LATTER PROPHECIES OF ZECHARIAH.

THE Jews at Babylon partook of the joy which the decree of Darius Hystaspes, promulgated on finding the roll containing the decree of Cyrus, afforded to their nation. But their first proceeding was too much in accordance with the natural inclination of the heart of man, to forget that past sufferings are testimonies of the evil of sin. They sent to Jerusalem to inquire, whether it was needful still to observe the fasts in which the destruction of Jerusalem was commemorated. In answer, they were reminded of the selfish views that had engrossed them, even when engaged in those services. They were reminded of the causes of the sufferings of their nation, expressly set forth by the former prophets. Leaving them to consider

whether it was right for them to put away the remembrance that the sins of their fathers had produced deep and national sufferings, they were directed to the more important observances of judgment and mercy, and told to bear in mind that it was for disobedience the Lord had scattered them among the nations. Let us apply this to ourselves also.

The Jews were again encouraged to proceed in restoring Jerusalem, by a direct promise which beautifully depicts a city in a state of continued peace, Zech. viii. 4, 5.

> Thus saith the Lord of hosts;
> There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem,
> And every man with his staff in his hand for very age.
> And the streets of the city shall be full
> Of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof.

Read the impressive description of the troublous times that had so recently occurred, Zech. viii. 10.

> For before these days
> The hire of man became nothing, and the hire for beast;
> Neither was there any peace to him that went out or came in
> Because of the affliction:
> For I set all men every one against his neighbour.

In England, we know not this sad state of things, and it may be fading from the recollection of the nations on the continent of Europe; but it was otherwise when the remembrance was fresh of the painful consequences of the wars of that man, who after having been used as "the rod of God's anger," to correct the nations, was broken and cast aside, leaving his name, "at which the world grew pale, to point a moral or adorn a tale." May we never lightly value the blessing of peace at home; and may those hasty and bitter spirits, who, on one side or the other, think lightly of civil discord and deeds of blood, may they be kept under by the restraining hand of HIM, who can alike say, "Peace, be still," to the conflicting

elements, and to the embittered spirits of man. All the promises of Divine favour in outward blessings, invariably are accompanied by reference to PEACE. Thus, Zech. viii. 16, (margin,) "Judge truth and the judgment of peace in your gates;" and ver. 19, "Love the truth and peace." With this is connected a remarkable promise of the future glories of Israel, see ver. 22, 23.

In the sixth year of Darius the temple was finished. An account of the solemn dedication of the building to the Lord, is recorded, Ezra vi. 16—22. Many sacrifices were offered; among them were sin-offerings for each of the twelve tribes. The temple had been twenty years in building; many an anxious thought had been occasioned by the delay in its completion; many an aged Jew had watched its gradual advance, or lamented over the pauses in the work, when he considered it was not probable that the temple services would be restored till after he was laid in the silent grave.

Connected with this event several Psalms are placed, as the 48th, 81st, 146th, 148th, 149th, 150th; but, of course, with some degree of uncertainty.

The following month brought round the season for the passover, when the children of Israel who had returned from captivity, and had separated themselves from the defilements of the heathen, joyfully celebrated the festival. The recent freedom from Babylon would cause them to look back with thankfulness for the deliverance from Egyptian bondage; both events would lead some, if not many of them, to look forward to the greater deliverance, from the spiritual adversary, and the bitter bondage of sin. In like manner, the believer of every age rejoices to recal to mind his deliverance from captivity, by commemorating the dying love of the Saviour, while partaking of that ordinance in which our blessed Lord directed his disciples should unite, saying, "This do in remembrance of me," Luke xxii. 19.

A very remarkable passage, in reference to this celebration of the passover, is found in Justin Martyr's conference with Trypho the Jew. He speaks of Ezra as on this occasion expounding the mystery of the passover, in words which some suppose stood in Ezra vi., between verses 20 and 21, but were early struck out by the Jews; others place them later in the book. It is as follows:—"And Ezra said to the people, This passover is our Saviour and our Refuge; and if ye shall understand and ponder it in your hearts, that we are about to humble them in this sign, and afterwards shall believe on him, then this place shall not be made desolate for ever, saith the Lord of hosts. But if ye will not believe on him, nor hear his preaching, ye shall be a laughing stock to the Gentiles."

This passage is remarkable, and was considered genuine by the early Christian father who cites it; but as it is not found in any copies of the Greek versions, we may conclude that it had crept into some early Greek Bibles from a marginal addition, rather than that it was ever found in any part of the inspired sacred text, and then was left out by the Jews after the time of Christ. Nor do we need any such addition to the Bible; it is for us to take it as we find it, assured that all things requisite for our instruction are contained therein. God will not suffer any word that is needful for the salvation of his people to be lost.

Whether any direct reference to the Saviour was expressed by Ezra or not, we need not doubt that the view taken in Psalm cxlvi. was set forth by him. We may here give it as paraphrased;

True to his everlasting word,
  He loves the injured to redress;
Poor helpless souls, the bounteous Lord
  Relieves, and fills with plenteousness:
He sets the mournful prisoners free,
He bids the blind their Saviour see.

The Lord thy God, O Zion, reigns
  Supreme in mercy as in power;
The endless theme of heavenly strains,
  When time and death shall be no more;
And all eternity shall prove
Too short to utter all his love.

The concluding chapters of Zechariah, also, imply that especial reference to the promised Saviour was made about this period, and that the spiritual character of the Messiah was impressed upon the Jews. Read Zech. ix. 9, so literally fulfilled by our Lord Jesus Christ when upon earth.

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion;
Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh
  unto thee:
He is just, and having salvation;
Lowly, and riding upon an ass,
And upon a colt the foal of an ass.

Take the words which follow, verses 11, 12, which have afforded the text of many a sermon, in which the full and free offers of the gospel, have been urged upon souls sighing for deliverance from the hard and bitter bondage of sin.

Read also the remarkable prediction in chap. xi., in which the paltry price paid for betraying Christ, thirty pieces of silver, is spoken of with irony as "a goodly price, that I was prized at of them!" Also the final disposal of the ill-bestowed and ill-gotten money for

the purchase of the potter's field, as recorded by the evangelist, see Matt. xxvii.,* is expressly stated.

The conversion of the Jews yet to come is declared, Zech. xii. 10; xiii. 1:

And I will pour upon the house of David,
And upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem,
The spirit of grace and of supplications:
And they shall look upon me whom they have pierced,
And they shall mourn for him,
As one mourneth for his only son,
And shall be in bitterness for him,
As one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.—
In that day there shall be a fountain opened
To the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem
For sin and for uncleanness.

This invitation is addressed to every age and nation, as an English poet expresses:

There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;
And sinners plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.

In chap. xiii. 7, the sufferings of Christ are set forth,

* Two things connected with the latter prophecies of Zechariah require notice. 1. That, in Matt. xxvii. 9, part of this prophecy is spoken of as proceeding from Jeremiah. It is thought that the word "Jeremiah," is an interpolation by a copyist, probably accidental, as some versions say only "the prophet." 2. That passage, and other observations made on the general scope of the latter six chapters of Zechariah, induce some to think they ought rather to be attributed to Jeremiah than to Zechariah; but T. H. Horne and others have plainly shown there is no occasion to entertain such a supposition. The Zacharias slain between the temple and the altar, Matt. xxiii. 35, is thought by some to have been this prophet; but we may rather conclude him to have been the son of Jehoiada, whose name signifies the same as Barachiah, and whose son was slain by the command of the ungrateful Joash, who refused to listen to his faithful admonitions; a circumstance characteristic of the times before the captivity, rather than of those which immediately followed the deliverance from Babylon.

This passage was applied by himself, Matt. xxvi. 31; Mark xiv. 37, when he, as the Shepherd, was smitten, and his disciples were scattered as sheep. The particulars are very remarkable, especially as preserved by the Jews; for their sin in crucifying the Lord of life and glory is the more aggravated, when it is considered that they possessed such clear predictions, uttered by one of the last of their prophets, who had been so instrumental in forwarding the work of building that temple, in which they conspired to destroy Him of whom the prophet spoke.

In the concluding chapter is a very remarkable prediction of the latter days, when there "shall be one Lord, and his name one." Thus, in Zechariah, we have an evangelical prophet, one scarcely less so than Isaiah, to whom that epithet is often given. We are encouraged to look forward to that day when all shall be "Holiness to the Lord," and also to apply the words of truth uttered by Zechariah, for our individual instruction and comfort: see Zech. xiv. 7.

At evening time let there be light:
  Life's little day draws near its close;
Around me fall the shades of night,
  The night of death, the grave's repose:
  To crown my joys, to end my woes,
At evening time let there be light.

At evening time let there be light:
  Stormy and dark hath been my day;
Yet rose the morn divinely bright,
  Dews, birds, and blossoms cheered the way;
  Oh for one sweet, one parting ray!
At evening time let there be light.

At evening time there shall be light;
  For God hath spoken—it must be;
Fear, doubt, and anguish take their flight,
  Mine eyes shall his salvation see,
'Tis evening time, and there is light.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MAGIANS—THEIR DOCTRINES—ZOROASTER—DARIUS HYSTASPES PROTECTS THE JEWS.

It is thought that Darius Hystaspes protected the Jews during the remainder of his reign, which, in the whole, lasted thirty-six years, from B.C. 521 to B.C. 485. He was not quite a blind idolater, being a follower of Zoroaster, who was a reformer of the religious system that prevailed among the Persians. Zoroaster and his religious creed may be briefly noticed here. Prideaux gives a full account of him. At this time the idolatry of what was then considered the civilized world, was divided between the Sabians, who were worshippers of images, and the Magians, who worshipped fire, or the sun, the great source of light and heat. These wrong notions of the Deity may have proceeded, in some degree, from the sense which is in all mankind, of their vileness and sinfulness, even

as expressed by the prophets, Isaiah, liii. 6, and Jeremiah, xvii. 9.

These views being entertained, though not duly acknowledged, they considered God as too holy to be approached by such creatures as themselves; they looked out for a mediator, or a means whereby they might approach the Most High, according to the anxious inquiry with which Balak addressed Balaam, Micah vi. 6:

> Wherewith shall I come before the Lord,
> And bow myself before the high God.

The Saviour, the Son of God, Christ Jesus, was not then so clearly revealed as he is set forth in the gospel, mankind did not know in "the times of this ignorance," that we may "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need," Heb. iv. 16. They therefore sought out mediators of their own choosing; the earliest, and it may be said, the most obvious, were the heavenly bodies; and probably the attempt to impress more forcibly the mass of the people, led to the representing of the planets by images; for the heavenly bodies evidently were meant by the first idols that were worshipped as gods by the ancient nations in general.

The number of these false deities was increased by heroes and celebrated characters, who were considered as having been exalted after death into gods and demigods. But to pursue the subject of pagan idolatry, that chosen work of the devil, would require a volume in itself; our present object is to notice the worshippers of fire, who abominated images. We shall find them equally opposed to Scripture truth.

Their leading doctrine was, that there were two principles in existence, one the cause of all good, the other the cause of all evil; the power of light, and the power of darkness. Between these, they considered there would be unceasing opposition to the end of the world, when the good god, Oramasdes, would over-

come the evil god, Arimanes. Fire, or light, was the symbol of the former; as such, it was kept burning in all their temples. It is easy to perceive that these views were derived from the patriarchal theology; but the errors respecting good and evil, and as to their limiting the power of the Almighty, show their wide departure therefrom.

One who entered into the views of the Magian system, as Darius, would be interested in the Jews, whose faith, grounded on revelation, alone could present to him a way of escape from the mazes of such a false belief as that of the Magians. He regarded the Jews with favour, and was interested in their welfare; he therefore gave orders in accordance with those of Cyrus, that their house should be builded, and their interest as a people protected. This confirmation, or re-issuing the decree of Cyrus by Darius Hystaspes, may be considered as the full re-establishment of the Jewish state. The date of the completion of the temple, by the powers of this decree, was B.C. 516, seventy years from the destruction of the city by Nebuchadnezzar, B.C. 586.

A sort of reformation took place about this period among the Magians, which seems likely to have been connected with the intercourse of the Jews with Babylon. Zoroaster, or Zerdusht, was the author, or the main instrument of this reformation. He was skilled in the learning of the East, and evidently had become well acquainted with the Jewish Scriptures; but he wrested them to his own destruction, seeking to build up a system of fraud, though, in some respects, preferable to that of his countrymen. Zoroaster is said to have been the servant of a prophet, from whom he became well acquainted with the Jewish Scriptures. His master probably was Daniel. It is likely that Zoroaster was of Jewish origin, or he would hardly have been retained by a Jew, and instructed so as to become thoroughly versed in the Jewish learning. It is expressly said he was a native of Palestine. His object was to revive or restore the Magian religion, then

under a cloud by the political disgrace in which it was involved by the usurpation of the false Smerdis, and the proneness of the people to run after the more corrupted and grosser Sabian idolatry. He improved the Magian religion, by teaching the belief of a Supreme Being, superior to those conflicting powers of good and evil, originally taught by this faith or superstition. He might ground this on the sublime declaration, Isa. xlv. 5—7, already quoted in the account of Cyrus.

Prideaux states at length the principles which Zoroaster taught; they need not be given here. It is sufficient to say, that he united the recognition of ONE Supreme Being with the worship of the sun and of the sacred fires. That worship he caused to be offered in temples, with care in the selection of fuel, and other particular observances evidently derived from the Jewish worship. Another proof of the source from whence he derived his views, is found in the sacred books which he prepared, in imitation of the Hebrew Scriptures. These are called Zendavesta. When first presented to Darius, they were written in twelve books, each containing a hundred skins of vellum. The word Zendavesta signifies a firekindler, implying that the contents would kindle true religion in all who read therein. Much of these contents evidently are derived from the Old Testament, the history of the creation and the deluge. Abraham is described as the author of the Magian religion in its original purity, to which it was said to be brought back by Zoroaster. Many precepts of the Levitical law are urged, many devotional expressions of the Psalms are copied, Particulars of the life and actions of the false prophet take up part of the book, with precepts for the life and conduct of his followers. In some instances the customs and views of the Persians are allowed, showing evidently the earthly and defective origin of the system. The doctrines and proceedings of Zoroaster were more dangerous from their simulation of what is right, and their approximation thereto. Hales considers these books as spurious, and of much later date, but this question does not inter-

fere with the account given of Zoroaster, who was the chief supporter, or instrument of Darius, in the reform of the Magian religion, the design of which evidently was to bring it nearer to the Jewish faith, and its patriarchal purity, especially by teaching a future judgment, when all matters in this life would be cleared up, and apparent difficulties explained and reconciled.

Some eastern writers attribute to Zoroaster a prophecy of a great prophet that should arise, the birth of a Divine child in Palestine. Such views might easily be adopted from the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah. We may differ from Prideaux, and need not consider Zoroaster as a vile impostor, like Mohammed; he seems rather to have been one who sought to reform the false notions of his countrymen: but acting with human views and human powers, and seeking human ends, he fell into many inconsistencies, and taught many errors. The important fact, that he was highly esteemed and reverenced in his day by the Greeks, as well as by his own countrymen, clearly appears; also, that he derived all his knowledge of good from the source of true wisdom, the Holy Scriptures. From him Pythagoras derived much of the system he taught. The remains of the Magian sect exist at the present day in the East, though persecuted and almost destroyed by the Mohammedans.

Darius Hystaspes was succeeded by his son Xerxes, B.C. 485. Some writers consider that he was the Ahasuerus of the book of Esther; but this is not probable, though he also is called Ahasuerus in Ezra, ch. iv. 6, where is recorded an application made to him by the accusers of the Jews. The result is not mentioned there, but Josephus states it was unsuccessful. He confirmed the former privileges of the Jews, with the grant of the Samaritan tribute for the purposes of their temple worship.

Xerxes is the monarch who invaded Greece with an army of two millions of men, whose march over the bridge that for a short time united Europe and Asia at the Hellespont, continued for several days incessantly.

His signal defeat, and return to Asia in a fishing boat, is known to every reader of ancient history; but the particulars do not call for our notice, as they did not directly bear upon the history of the Jews at that period. This remarkable event, however, is recorded in holy writ. Xerxes is the fourth king of Persia, mentioned by Daniel, ch. xi. 2, as the one far richer than those who went before him, who should "by his strength through his riches stir up all against the realm of Grecia." Among the eastern forces in this expedition, a band is described by Herodotus, proceeding from the Solymean country, who appear to have been Jews. By the payment of a considerable sum, Xerxes induced the Carthagenians, a colony from Phenicia, settled in Africa, to invade the Grecian colonies settled in Sicily. Thus ALL were stirred up, but in vain. These attempts wholly failed, and Xerxes returned to Susa. It is related that, through the whole of this warfare, and in his return homewards, he everywhere destroyed the temples in which images were worshipped; thus, as a Magian, showing decided aversion to the Sabian idolatry. On this occasion the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah, against the idols of Babylon, came to pass, Isa. xxi. 9; xlvi. 1, 2; Jer. li. 44, 47, 52;

And, behold, here cometh a chariot of men,
With a couple of horsemen.
And he answered and said,
Babylon is fallen, is fallen;
And all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground.—
Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth,
Their idols were upon the beasts, and upon the cattle:
Your carriages were heavy loaden;
They are a burden to the weary beast.
They stoop, they bow down together;
They could not deliver the burden,
But themselves are gone into captivity.
And I will punish Bel in Babylon,
And I will bring forth out of his mouth that which he hath swallowed up:
And the nations shall not flow together any more unto him;

Yea, the wall of Babylon shall fall.
Therefore, behold, the days come,
That I will do judgment upon the graven images of Babylon:
And her whole land shall be confounded,
And all her slain shall fall in the midst of her.
Wherefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord,
That I will do judgment upon her graven images:
And through all her land the wounded shall groan.

Xerxes might be influenced by adherence to Magian principles; but he also, doubtless, was instigated by the desire to supply his exhausted treasury from the riches stored up in these temples, principally vested in the images of gold and silver, whose value brought on their destruction. Here it may be well to notice the vast abundance of the precious metals in those days. It is true, that the space upon the globe wherein these metals were deemed valuable, then was much smaller than in our days. Also, the broad line of distinction between the rulers and commonalty, then existing, confined the gold and silver to fewer hands; but the mines which indisputably were then worked, must have produced vast supplies, much of which has disappeared by the waste of years, and the violent convulsions of the Roman empire when invaded by the Northern Barbarians. These mines being exhausted, no further stores could be drawn from them. The scarcity of the precious metals, during the middle ages, is apparent from history. The produce of the American mines has, in part, supplied this deficiency; yet it may safely be assumed, that in proportion to the extent of the civilized world at the present day, there is a smaller mass of gold and silver among the nations, than at the period under our notice.

Here we may leave the history of Xerxes, only remarking, that it is connected with the wondrous course of events foretold in prophecy, and gradually unfolded to us.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DECLINE OF BABYLON, AND THE PRESENT STATE OF ITS RUINS.

(See the Plan, page 142.)

THE prominent position which Babylon occupies in the history of the Jews, with the remarkable fulfilment of prophecy, which its own history presents, requires that some notices should be given of the decline and fall of this splendid city, once the mistress of the known world, now a heap of rubbish, a den of wild beasts and noxious reptiles.

We have seen that Babylon suffered much when taken by Cyrus, and when plundered by Xerxes. It was no longer the metropolis of the East, the seat of government being transferred to Susa, Ecbatana, and Persepolis. Alexander, after his return from India, fixed his residence at Babylon, determined to restore its former greatness. He employed many thousand men in clearing the course of the river, and in removing away the rubbish that encumbered the temple of Belus. But the word of God had declared that such designs should not come to pass; these plans were stopped in a few months, by the death of Alexander, B.C. 323. The city was thus left to become more and more desolate, its palaces were crumbling to ruin, its temples demolished, its walls broken down, and the river, no longer confined by its banks, spread over a large extent of fertile country, rendering it a pestilential marsh, thus hastening the depopulation of the province.

Seleucus, the successor to Alexander in the eastern part of the empire, further hastened the decay of Babylon, by building the city of Seleucia, about forty miles distant, on the river Tigris. The next step to

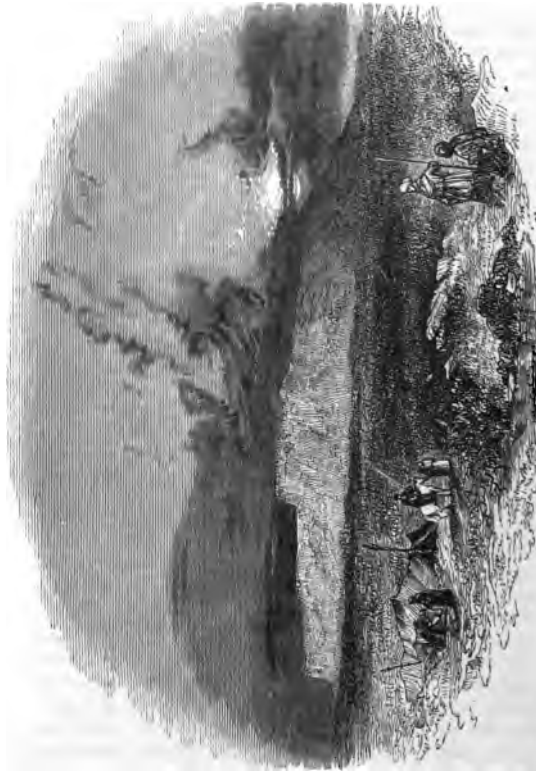
ruin, was from the invasion of the Parthians, about B.C. 130, when many of the remaining buildings were demolished, and the inhabitants carried into slavery. Diodorus Siculus, about B.C. 45, stated that the public buildings were fallen into decay; only a small part within the walls was inhabited, large portions of the remaining ground being tilled. Strabo, about A.D. 25, relates that the city was nearly deserted. Pliny, about A.D. 80, writes that Babylon was then decayed, unpeopled, and lying waste.

Babylon now presents only ruins of ruins. Pausanias, about the second century, speaks of it as having nothing remaining but the walls. Lucian, about the same time, says it would soon so disappear, that, like Nineveh, it would be sought and not be found. Jerome, in the fourth century, stated, from a monk who had visited the site, that the walls served as an inclosure for wild beasts, within which the kings of Persia hunted. Benjamin of Tudela is the next writer who mentions Babylon. He was there in the twelfth century. He saw what he considered to be some ruins of the palace, but the people were afraid to enter them on account of the scorpions and wild beasts. Rauwolf, in 1574, described the country as dry and barren, and saw a pile of ruins, which he thought was the remains of the tower of Babel, full of venomous creatures lodged in holes among the rubbish. Petro della Valla, in 1616, saw a heap of ruined buildings like a large mountain, the materials of which were all confounded together.

The remains of these ruins have been visited and accurately described by several modern travellers. Rich considers that the Khan or Caravanserai of Mohawil, and the modern town of Hillah, mark the site of Babylon; between which places, for an extent of many miles, is a dreary waste, covered with vestiges of buildings. He says, "The ruins of Babylon may be said almost to commence from Mohawil, the whole country between it and Hillah, (a distance of nine miles,) exhibiting at intervals, traces of buildings, in which are discoverable

THE KASR.

burnt and unburnt bricks and bitumen." In some parts remains of walls may be traced; but, in general, only mounds of rubbish, destitute of verdure. Those most considerable are on the eastern side of the Euphrates, and not far from the river, called the Mujelibé, the Amram, and the Kasr. The walls of the latter are firmly built. It is considered to be the remains of a part of the palace, and contains vast quantities of burned bricks, laid in lime mortar; the removal of large portions of them has rendered this mound a confused mass, in which are found many remains of earthen and other vessels, and some sepulchral urns, considered to be of Grecian origin. In one place, by digging into the mass, a colossal statue of a lion, of rude workmanship, was brought to view. The Kasr is an irregular square, about seven hundred yards on each side, and about seventy feet high. Its appearance is much altered, even within the last few years, since it was seen by Rich, a quantity of bricks having been removed from it. Most of these bricks have unknown characters on their faces, which are invariably placed downwards. Sir R. K. Porter considers the Kasr contains the remains of the hanging gardens. The Amram is a mound about half a mile to the south of the Kasr, rather larger than that pile. It is an irregular heap of earth, with fragments of bricks and pottery. Porter considers that the foundations of the great palace are under this mass; and that a mound which connects it with the Kasr, originally once formed a terraced avenue between these structures. The Mujelibé is an oblong square, about five hundred and fifty feet one way, and two hundred and thirty the other, and one hundred and forty feet in height. It is formed of sun-dried bricks, cemented by bitumen, with layers of reeds; regular lines of brickwork being visible on each face of the pile. Remains of buildings may be traced on the top. It seems to have been a lofty platform, with passages and chambers, once crowned with various structures, a usual form of the most considerable



THE MUJELIBE.

eastern palaces. On one side, a gallery was found, containing skeletons in wooden coffins; the Babylonian method of interment. Porter considers this ruin may be the remains of the fortified palace.

On the western side of the river, about six miles from the bank, beyond the limits of our plan, in the south-western direction from Hillah, is the vast pile called Birs Nemroud, supposed to be the remains of the pyramid or temple of Belus, probably of the tower of Babel. It appears to have been built in stages, or stories, diminishing towards the top. The height from the plain to the summit of the brick wall, represented in the annexed engraving, is two hundred and thirty-five feet, in which Buckingham thought that he traced four stages or stories. From its appearance, the upper part of the Birs Nemroud seems to have been broken down by violence, and to show traces of fire having been applied to it; though Rich considers it not easy to say in what manner. Large masses of vitrified brick are on the summit. It literally appears to be a burned mountain, but only in the upper part. Some conjecture that these burned masses form parts of the upper towers, and that it was overthrown, being struck by fire from heaven. It is certain, that no earthly heat, but that of a very intense furnace, could have had the effect; and it is not easy to conceive how such heat could be made to act on these elevated masses of wall, while the lower parts of the ruins do not present any such appearance. The bricks of this tower are mostly stamped with the ancient square character. Porter, when at a distance, observed some dark objects moving along the summit of the hill; on examining them with his glass, they were found to be lions, whose dens were in the cavities of the mound.

What shapeless form, half lost on high,
  Seems like a ghost to glide,
And watch from Babel's crumbling heap,
Where in her shadow, fast asleep
  Lies fallen imperial pride?

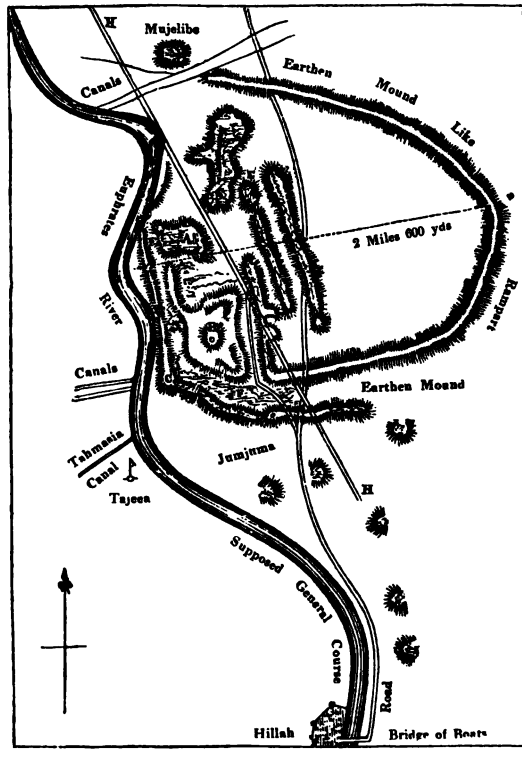
THE BIRS NEMROUD.

With half-closed eye, a lion there
Is basking in his noontide lair,
Or prowls in twilight gloom.

Near this vast mass is a mound of lesser elevation, but of greater extent, supposed to be the remains of the temple of Belus. Other ruins are spread over the space between the Birs and the western bank of the Euphrates, but not so remarkable as those on the east. Rich says, "Round the Birs are traces of ruins to a considerable extent."

Some traces of the embankment along the river Euphrates, which formed a barrier against the water, as well as a defence against the attacks of enemies, still remain; and large fragments of the wall are also to be discerned under water. Porter remarked these; also some lofty ridges which appear to have enclosed the Kasr and Amram, forming a space similar to that described by historians to be occupied by the fortified palace: he also notices vestiges within this boundary, which he considers to be those of the second and third walls by which this enclosure was surrounded. The river appears partly to have changed its course; thus the site of Babylon has become more confined.

It has long been considered that no traces of the "broad walls" of Babylon remain, indeed it is obvious that these would be likely to disappear; parts of them were precipitated into the ditch by Darius, and the burned bricks would be the most convenient to remove, to build Seleucia, Bagdad, Hillah, and other neighbouring cities, both ancient and of later date; any remaining masses of earth would be reduced by time and weather to the state of the soil. Buckingham, however, found a solid mass of brickwork at Al-Hheimar, about ten miles from Hillah, which he thought might be a portion of these walls. If this isolated fragment was a portion of these walls, its distance from other ruins in the opposite direction, would agree with the statement of the dimensions of the city, as being fifteen miles each way; a small portion



A. The Kasr.—B. The Amram.—C. Mound of the embankment.—D. Lesser Palace.—E. A mound called the Red Mound.—F. Supposed course of the Euphrates.—H. Supposed by some to have once been the course of the Euphrates.

only remaining proves the utter destruction of the rest. The words of the prophet, Jer. l. 2, are realized, "Merodach is broken in pieces." Keith supposes this may be applied to the state of the Mujelibé, once probably the palace of "Merodach," the title or name common to the ancient princes of Babylon. "Bel is confounded;" this is equally applicable to the state of the Birs Nemroud, now a confused, mis-shapen mass.

The foregoing conjectures respecting the masses of ruins agree with the description of Babylon by Herodotus, who visited the city about B.C. 440; he describes the palace on one side of the river, and the temple of Belus on the other. Berosus speaks of two palaces, one builded by the ancient kings; the other, adjoining it, builded by Nebuchadnezzar, corresponding with the situation of the Mujelibé and Amram.

The fulfilment of prophecy with regard to Babylon has been very remarkable. While it was in the height of its power and glory, and even before it had arrived at that height, the prophet, speaking by Divine inspiration, described its present state of desolation with minuteness and fidelity. This was more than a hundred years before an enemy had approached its gates; and several centuries before the mighty city began to decay to any considerable extent. So far back as about B.C. 700, and before its high and palmy state had begun, the prophet Isaiah gave the following description of Babylon as it *now* is, Isa. xiii. 19—22;

And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms,
The beauty of the Chaldees' excellency,
Shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.
It shall never be inhabited,
Neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation:
Neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there;
Neither shall the shepherds make their fold there.
But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there;
And their houses shall be full of doleful creatures;
And owls shall dwell there,

And satyrs shall dance there.
And the wild beasts of the island shall cry in their desolate houses,
And dragons in their pleasant palaces:
And her time is near to come,
And her days shall not be prolonged.

The prophet was directed to personify this glorious city as the daughter of the Chaldeans, condemned to ignominious labour, silence, and darkness, Isa. xlvii. Its destruction would be rapid and unexpected, notwithstanding all vain confidence, and the encouragement of her "astrologers, stargazers, and monthly prognosticators," ver. 13. Read the denunciation against these false foretellers of future events, with the express declaration, that "they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame," ver. 14; and wonder that any one in a Christian land should listen to the like delusions. The "monthly prognosticators," probably were those who predicted events to come, like the almanack makers of later times; and, painful to say, the most popular and widely sold almanack in England, at the present day, contains "monthly prognostications," to which, though every year falsified by events, its circulation appears to be mainly owing! Contrasted with this desolate daughter of Babylon, reference is made, Isa. xlix. 13—26, to the daughter of Zion. The loving-kindness and mercy of the Most High towards her is beautifully described.

Jeremiah accurately predicted many of the circumstances which attended the siege and capture of Babylon, he also was directed to give some notice of its future state. These are declared, Jer. xxv. 12—14;

And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the Lord, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations. And I will bring upon that land all my words which I have pronounced against it, even all that is written in this book, which Jeremiah hath prophesied against all the nations. For many nations and great kings shall

serve themselves of them also: and I will recompense them according to their deeds, and according to the works of their own hands.

Also other particulars will be found in Jer. l. and li., where it is expressly stated, that, "because of the wrath of the Lord it shall not be inhabited, but it shall be wholly desolate." And of this, once the most fertile of all lands, long has been realized the prophetic denunciation,

Cut off the sower from Babylon,
And him that handleth the sickle in the time of harvest.
The sea is come up upon Babylon:
She is covered with the multitude of the waves thereof.

Not only has Babylon been overrun by the enemy, in the figurative language of prophecy, but literally, when the river overflows its banks: at which time, as Rich states, the ruins are inundated so as to render many parts of them inaccessible, the valleys and low grounds being turned into morasses; while the same spots at other times, and the summits of the ruinous heaps at all times, are as "a desert, a dry land, and a wilderness." Her idols are confounded, her graven images broken, and the fragments are still often turned up among the ruins. We have not space to go through each article of comparison between Babylon in its state of glory and in its ruinous heaps. The records of the human race do not present a more striking contrast. Mignan says, "I cannot portray the overpowering sensation of reverential awe, that possessed my mind while contemplating the extent and magnitude of ruin and destruction on every hand."

Fallen is stately Babylon!
Her mansions from the earth are gone.
For ever quenched, no more her beam
Shall gem Euphrates' voiceless stream.
Her mirth is hushed, her music fled,
All, save her very name, is dead;
And the lone river rolls her flood,
Where once a thousand temples stood.

Queen of the golden east! afar
Thou shon'st Assyria's morning star:
Till God, by righteous anger driven,
Expelled thee from thy place in heaven.
For false and treacherous was thy ray,
Like swampy lights that lead astray;
And o'er the splendour of thy name,
Rolled many a cloud of sin and shame.

For ever fled, thy princely shrines
Rich with their wreaths of clustering vines,
Priest, censer, incense—all are gone
From the deserted altar stone.
Belshazzar's halls are desolate,
And vanished their imperial state;
E'en as the pageant of a dream,
That floats unheard on memory's stream.

Fallen is Babylon! and o'er
The silence of her hidden shore,
Where the gaunt satyr shrieks and sings,
Hath mystery waved his awful wings:
Concealed from eyes of mortal men,
Or angels' more pervading ken,
The ruined city lies unknown;
Her site to all but God unknown.

A Company of Travellers in the East.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ARTAXERXES LONGIMANUS—ESTHER MADE QUEEN—EZRA CONDUCTS THE SECOND LARGE DIVISION OF THE JEWS TO JERUSALEM—REFORMATION EFFECTED—THE CANON OF THE SACRED SCRIPTURES ARRANGED.

ARTAXERXES LONGIMANUS began to reign B.C. 464. The commencement of his reign was unpromising to the Jews. The rebuilding of Jerusalem was stopped by an application from Rehum, Shimshai, and others, in the name of the Samaritan colonies and officers. They alleged that Jerusalem was of old a rebellious and bad city, hurtful to kings and princes, exciting seditions, on which account it had been destroyed, but the Jews were now rebuilding it. A decree was issued, commanding that the work should be stopped; on receiving which, the adversaries went to Jerusalem and made the Jews to cease by force and by

power. The particulars are given Ezra iv. 6—24, where the narrative is introduced as a parenthesis in the account of the former stoppage of the work. Artaxerxes may have been disposed to this interference, from the Egyptians having revolted on hearing of the death of Xerxes. If Jerusalem were fortified, he might think that the Jews would be inclined to throw off the Persian yoke, which would be a hinderance to any Persian army proceeding against Egypt.

It is generally considered that Artaxerxes Longimanus was the Ahasuerus of the book of Esther. From thence we learn, that in the third year of his reign, being established on his throne, he made a great festival at Susa, or Shusan, in Persia, which became the seat of the government, while Babylon was neglected. This festival lasted several months; it was marked by riotous excesses. On one occasion, the inebriated monarch required his queen, Vashti, to come forth from the retirement of her palace, to show her beauty to the princes and the people, in their drunken revelry. On her refusal, the royal counsellors represented that it was a dangerous precedent for the queen to disobey the king, and for a wife to disregard the commands of her husband. Vashti was deprived of her rank, while the most beautiful young females that could be found were selected, from among whom the king might choose one to supply her place. Esther, a Jewish orphan, brought up by her uncle Mordecai, was chosen. The narrative shows the degraded state of females in the East, also the manner in which families there are liable to be interfered with, and their happiness destroyed, by the mandate of an Eastern despot.

The parentage and country of the new queen does not appear to have been known to Artaxerxes, when his heart was first inclined to favour the Jews. The Egyptian revolters having been subdued, it was desirable to bring Judea into a more settled state. Some circumstance, which is not known, induced one

of rank and influence among the Jews to take up the cause of his nation. This was Ezra, a scribe and priest of the law, a descendant of Aaron, and grandson or great grandson of Seraiah the high priest, who was slain when Jerusalem was taken by Nebuchadnezzar, consequently Ezra was of note among the Jews. He was sent to Judea, with full powers and liberal contributions from the king and his counsellors, in addition to those from the Jews remaining at Babylon, to be expended in adorning the temple, and supplying its services. He had authority to appoint magistrates and judges, also to take with him any Jews inclined to return to Jerusalem. This commission is recorded at length, Ezra vii. 11—26. Ezra made the request, but he ascribes the compliance of Artaxerxes directly to Him who turneth the hearts of kings withersoever he will, as the rivers of water, Prov. xxi. 1. Ezra also himself sought for strength from on high, to bear him up in this arduous undertaking, Ezra vii. 10, 27, 28:

> For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.
>
> Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem: and hath extended mercy unto me before the king, and his counsellors, and before all the king's mighty princes. And I was strengthened as the hand of the Lord my God was upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me.

Artaxerxes evidently had referred to the former decrees, especially that of Cyrus; he did not hesitate to avow this in his own decree, Ezra vii. 23, "Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven: for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?" The royal treasures were to supply whatever might be wanting for this work.

Ezra gathered a company of one thousand seven

hundred and fifty-four persons. Having appointed a station for assembling, Ezra viii. 15, which is usual before the departure of a caravan, or large body of travellers, in the East, he found none of the Levites present. He therefore sent to a place in which some of them dwelt, and induced thirty-eight to join his party. Ezra made a further preparation for his journey, by observing a solemn fast.

Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him. So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was intreated of us.

Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go unto Jerusalem: and the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as laid in wait by the way.

Let it be remembered, the way they had to pass

never has been without enemies to the traveller, from the days of Ishmael to the present time. Then, as now, the wandering tribes of Arabs laid in wait to plunder and destroy. See the engraving, page 150.

Ezra and his train set forward on the twelfth day of the first month, and reached Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes, after a journey of four months. They were the more exposed to dangers on the route, on account of the gold and silver they carried; but Ezra trusted in the protection of the Lord in whose service he went, and when God's work is to go forward the enemy shall not stop it.

From this period, when the rebuilding of Jerusalem, proceeded with vigour, several chronologers date the seventy weeks marked in the prophecy of Daniel.

Immediately on the arrival of Ezra at Jerusalem, he offered sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, burnt offerings and sin offerings. His attention was soon called to the intermarriages of the Jews with the surrounding idolaters. These unions were contrary to the Divine law, they threatened to bring down wrath again upon the nation, and were the more likely to be influential, as the princes and rulers were "chief in this trespass." If they were permitted, Israel would soon cease to be separated from other nations, it would no longer be God's heritage.

Ezra humbled himself before the Lord, seeking direction by humble prayer, acknowledging the offences of the people, confessing their sins, and casting himself upon the Divine mercy, leaving all with the Lord. It is a remarkable address; the people were deeply affected: some of the leaders encouraged him to proceed at once with the work of reformation. The men of Judah and Benjamin assembled at Jerusalem in three days, upon being summoned to do so: this was in the ninth month. They agreed to separate from their idolatrous wives, and to give up their intercourse with the nations around them. Their attention seems

to have been the more excited, by an outward sign of the Divine displeasure in the visitation of a heavy rain. A thorough investigation was made, which occupied two months. Among those who had contracted sinful alliances were the sons of the high priest.

Ezra continued to reside at Jerusalem as a preacher of righteousness, and a skilful scribe in the law of God. His attention was directed to the completing the canon of Scripture, that is, to collecting the inspired writings which form the Old Testament. The word CANON, was anciently used to designate a book, or catalogue. It was applied to Scripture to denote such writings as are to be received as an infallible RULE of faith and practice.

Before we proceed with this subject, let us pause—it is *indeed* an important subject. Is there any of equal importance? Can any mortal fully appreciate the value of the HOLY SCRIPTURES? The value of that word, which is a lamp unto the feet, and a light unto the path of the believer, in his passage through the wilderness of this life, and the dark valley which closes his mortal course! The wisest of men have admitted the vast importance of the Bible, and urged attention to its words. Listen to the testimony of that profound philosopher, Locke, who says, "Study the Holy Scriptures—therein are contained words of eternal life. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth without any mixture of error for its matter. It is all power, all sincere; nothing too much, nothing wanting." Sir William Jones wrote in his own Bible, "I have carefully and regularly perused these Holy Scriptures, and am of opinion that the volume, independently of its Divine origin, contains more sublimity, purer morality, more important history, and finer strains of eloquence, than can be collected from all other books, in whatever language they have been written." Are these deliberate opinions of wise men to be set aside by the coarse jest or flippant sarcasm

of the unholy infidel? Surely not: and if viewed merely on human grounds, it claims the highest regard. But of how much greater value is the BIBLE, when viewed as the word of God to the believer, as being the word of the Parent to the child, and that Parent one who is all-wise and all-powerful! One who knows even the thoughts and intents of the heart, who has *here* provided answers full and satisfactory to every sincere inquirer. Did any believer, oppressed with doubt and uncertainty, ever humbly and prayerfully seek for direction or instruction in this word without finding it? Surely not. The words of our blessed Lord are applicable; "Every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened," Matt. vii. 8. Apply also the words of the apostle; "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss," James iv. 3.

Let us look at the character of Ezra. He was highly respected and revered by the Jews, also by the Persians; the state papers and royal decrees, in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, are full evidence of the view taken of the Jews, by the different monarchs by whom they were issued, and also of Ezra himself. In the decree inserted Ezra vii., Artaxerxes speaks particularly of Ezra, as "a scribe of the law of the God of heaven;" and, when authorizing him to appoint magistrates, expressly desires it may be done "after the wisdom of thy God," further directing punishment to be inflicted upon "whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king." It is evident, from thence, that one main object Ezra had in view, when going to Jerusalem, was to promote the knowledge of the word of God; the importance of this was recognised by Artaxerxes.

The Jewish writers say, that Ezra collected together and set forth a correct edition of the Holy Scriptures; thus uniting the Pentateuch, or books of Moses, with the historical books and the writings of the prophets;

including also the Psalms, Proverbs, and all the books comprised in the Old Testament; except a few written subsequently. These books, and a few detached passages, might be added after his time, when the whole work was revised finally by Simon the Just and the great synagogue or Jewish council, about a hundred and twenty years later. There is no reason to doubt that Ezra was the honoured instrument, under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, to effect this work of fixing the canon of the Old Testament. At first, it consisted only of the Pentateuch, afterwards the historical books were added, then the Prophets and what are called the Hagiographia. Henderson has explained the order in which it is probable these were added, in his valuable work on "Divine Inspiration," to which the reader may be referred for many important statements on the subject. He shows the full and decisive evidence in support of the inspiration of the books called canonical, to the exclusion of the apocryphal books, which the church of Rome vainly has decreed shall be considered as inspired and sacred Scripture.

The Jews reckoned Ezra as the second founder of the law. He admitted nothing but what was clearly and undoubtedly to be accounted the word of God. Upon this strictness the Jews afterwards grounded their traditions, pretending that Ezra had also recognised what they call the oral law, as being of authority to interpret the written law. But, as our blessed Lord told the Scribes and Pharisees in his day, they made the word of God of none effect by their traditions. For further particulars concerning the oral law, with some account of the Mishna and Talmuds, which contain these traditions, the reader may refer to "*The Rites and Worship of the Jews.*" It is enough here to say, that none of these vain, and in many respects foolish traditions, can be ascribed to Ezra; and we may add, that whenever tradition has been brought forward to claim authority in matters of religion, an

inclination to set aside the sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures ever has been decidedly manifested.

Some writers, even among the Christian fathers, have gone into another error. They have considered that all the Scriptures were lost and destroyed in the Babylonish captivity, and that Ezra restored them all by Divine revelation. But there is no occasion to suppose such a needlessly miraculous interposition. Many copies of the law, doubtless, perished in the destruction of the temple and city, but some were preserved and carried away by the captives. Daniel evidently quotes from a copy of the law, Dan. ix. 11, 13. He also mentions the prophecies of Jeremiah, as being well acquainted with them. Ezekiel and Daniel were inspired to write parts of the Holy Scriptures in the land of captivity; many of the Psalms were penned there, or subsequently on the return to Judea, as well as the later historical books. Ezra brought forth a copy of the law to read to the people, at their desire.

Prideaux sums up the labours of Ezra, in this all-important work, under these heads. 1. He corrected the errors which had crept in by the negligence or mistakes of copyists. In this he would proceed with much caution, comparing different copies; and we may also believe he was divinely directed in cases of difficulty. 2. As already mentioned, he collected the writings of the prophets, the historical books, and the others esteemed canonical or inspired. Prideaux considers that the books of Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, and Malachi, were added afterwards, when the canon, or body of Jewish Scriptures, was fully and finally completed. 3. In his review of the Holy Scriptures, Ezra was doubtless taught to make some additions in the historical books, which are scattered through them and easily observed. This will explain any difficulty from such passages as Deut. iii. 14, where the words "unto this day," imply a period long after the context was written. Let us not hesitate to conclude that Ezra was divinely inspired in this work of

revision. Prideaux well remarks, "As it was necessary for the church of God that this work should be done, so also was it necessary for the work, that the person called thereto should be thus assisted in the completing of it." 4. The names of some places were changed, as Gen. xiv. 14. Dan, there mentioned, was not so called till after the death of Moses. Other instances might be referred to, but the design in all cases was to render the Scriptures more clear to the people.

Ezra is also considered, 5thly, to have written out the whole of the Scriptures in the Chaldee character, which from the time of the captivity came into general use among the Jews, while the Samaritans preserved the Hebrew character. This alteration was an important means for enabling the people at large to read the word of God for themselves; how different from the proceedings of those who would keep the Bible in a state in which it cannot be understood by the common people. How can we suppose that God has revealed his word for the general benefit of the human race, and yet confined the full use of it to a particular class of mankind, who are men of like passions as others; whose express commission is to set forth the gospel, not to restrict or confine it? "Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and *whosoever* among you feareth God, *to you* is the word of this salvation sent," Acts xiii. 26. It clearly appears from history, that every attempt to conceal, withhold, or encumber the word of God, has been connected with some human device or worldly object.

Whether the Hebrew vowel points were now added or not, has been made a question. Most writers consider that they are of later date, not being added till several centuries after the Christian era, when it is supposed they were introduced to give a more certain and defined meaning to several passages, limiting them to the sense in which the Jews desired them to be understood. They also became necessary when the language ceased to be generally spoken. Prideaux, on the

other hand, considers that these vowel points were introduced about the time of Ezra, or soon after. But the question need not be entered upon here; there is not anything about the great doctrines of Divine Truth depending upon them. It would be wrong to suppose that the meaning of any part of the Scriptures, as the word of salvation, ever was left uncertain.

To Ezra, also, is attributed the regular introduction of reading the Scriptures in the synagogue worship, instituted after the return from captivity. The services are described in "*The Rites and Worship of the Jews.*"

A brief sketch of the labours of Ezra has been given; but let no one suppose that the BIBLE ever was, or ever will be left uncertain or doubtful in its meaning, upon any point connected with the salvation of the soul. All the controversies which have arisen among men, will be found to proceed, either from a desire to explain away and to avoid the literal meaning, or else from a wish to draw the simple statements of Scripture further than originally designed, so as to make them subservient to the doctrines or views of men. This will explain the real history of many volumes of controversial divinity. But here, too often is forgotten that it is the best way to proceed by plain reference to the words of Scripture. Our blessed Lord silenced the adversary of souls, by "It is written." Whatever is *contrary* thereto, must be wrong; whatever goes *beyond* the plain meaning of Scripture, is of human device: it may be wrong, or it may be right; but, at any rate, there is no ground for teaching it as more than the commandments of men, of human beings liable to err, even when intending the best.

The proceedings of Ezra were the acts of one continually engaged in searching the Scriptures. We find them marked with that love for souls, and hatred for sin, which ever characterise those who really wish to walk according to God's holy word.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE HISTORY OF ESTHER—THE DANGER OF THE JEWS, AND THEIR DELIVERANCE.

WHILE Ezra was engaged at Jerusalem in the important work of collecting the Holy Scriptures, a deep-laid design for the destruction of all the Jews throughout the Persian empire, had nearly been successful. The particulars are related in the book of Esther. Although that book does not make a direct mention of the name of Jehovah, nor fully express the feelings of his people; yet it is one of the plainest records in existence to show the manner in which Divine Providence turns the hearts of men, causing the contrivers

of evil to be entangled and destroyed by their own devices. It shows how the rage and malice of persecutors is limited by Him, who says to the wind and the waves, "Peace; be still." Or, as in Jeremiah v. 22:

> Fear ye not me? saith the Lord:
> Will ye not tremble at my presence,
> Which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea
> By a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it:
> And though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail;
> Though they roar, yet can they not pass over it?

This book conveys a striking lesson of the instability of all human greatness; nay, of its certain downfal, unless secured by God's blessing.

After Esther had been raised to the rank of queen, her uncle Mordecai, who previously possessed some office or appointment in the palace, discovered a plot against the life of Artaxerxes, formed by two of the royal chamberlains. He made it known to Esther, who informed the king; the guilt of the conspirators was proved, they were executed, and a record was made of Mordecai's service, but no reward was given to him at the time.

Not long afterwards, Haman, an Amalekite, was advanced at court. The reason for his elevation is not stated, but all were commanded to reverence the new favourite. Mordecai, mindful of the former enmity of the Amalekites against the children of Israel, was unwilling to honour one of that accursed nation; the honour required seems, also, to have been a Divine honour or worship, which the Jewish religion forbade him from rendering to a mortal man. Haman was enraged at this, the more when he found that Mordecai was a Jew. Influenced by bitter hatred of that nation, he resolved to destroy not only Mordecai, but the whole people of the Jews. With this view, he made a false statement to Artaxerxes, representing the Jews to be

a people hurtful to the king, offering to pay ten thousand talents, (almost two millions of pounds of our money,) from their spoils, if their destruction was

ordered. This shows that they had become wealthy colonists, and were not mere slaves. The king consented without inquiry; a royal decree to that effect was issued; the Jews throughout the empire were all to be destroyed on one day, and their property to be seized. The particular day for this slaughter Haman selected by a superstitious casting of the lot, a process still very frequent in the East, especially in Persia, when the lucky day and hour for any undertaking, whether public or domestic, is sought with much anxiety. The decree was passed on the thirteenth of

the first month of the twelfth year of Artaxerxes; but the day selected for the destruction was not till the thirteenth of the twelfth month. This long space was providentially permitted, to give sufficient interval for disappointing the wicked design.

The city of Susa was troubled when the edict was sent forth. The Jews mourned and fasted, and put on sackcloth; but Haman engaged the king in a course of drunken revelry, to estrange him from Esther, and prevent his reflecting on what he had decreed.

The queen knew not of the decree, but was told of the unusual garb assumed by Mordecai, who could not enter the palace while thus arrayed. He stood in the space before the gate. Then, as now, a person may walk for a hundred days near the apartments of the royal females of a Persian monarch, yet have no means of seeing an inmate, or of communicating with any one within the walls. But Mordecai attracted the notice of the attendants. Esther was told of his mourning garb, she sent him other raiment; on his refusing to receive it, she sent a chamberlain to inquire the reason. Mordecai then caused her to be informed of all the particulars, and required her to go to the king and intercede with him for her people. Esther hesitated; to enter the royal presence unsent for, would expose her to be immediately put to death. Mordecai then warned her not to think that she would escape if her people suffered, and urged that most probably she had been raised to her exalted rank to meet the present emergency. Esther then resolved to comply, but prepared herself by fasting and prayer, requiring that all the Jews in Susa should do the same.

On the third day she presented herself before Ahasuerus. It was not a light matter to appear unbidden before a Persian king; even in later days, those monarchs have studiously secluded themselves from the public eye. But God gave Esther favour in the

king's sight; the golden sceptre was stretched forth

in mercy, a promise was given to grant any request she might make. The business was too solemn and important to be entered upon abruptly, nor is it customary to do so in the East, and Esther only requested that the king and Haman would come to a banquet she had prepared. They came, the promise was again made; her request was, that the king and Haman would attend her banquet on the morrow, when she would present her petition.

Haman returned home "joyful, and with a glad heart," at this new honour; but he was vexed at seeing Mordecai still refuse to pay him homage. He was full of indignation. Esth. v. 10—14:

> Nevertheless Haman refrained himself: and when he came home, he sent and called for his friends, and Zeresh his wife. And Haman told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king. Haman said moreover, Yea, Esther the queen did let no

man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared but myself; and to-morrow am I invited unto her also with the king. Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate. Then said Zeresh his wife and all his friends unto him, Let a gallows be made of fifty cubits high, and to-morrow speak thou unto the king that Mordecai may be hanged thereon: then go thou in merrily with the king unto the banquet. And the thing pleased Haman; and he caused the gallows to be made.

How striking is this simple narrative, and how remarkable the confession of this poor rich man! Many, like him, have no enjoyment of their wealth and power from some such trivial cause. Let the cottager and peasant know, that worldly possessions will not satisfy the heart, where Divine contentment does not prevail.

Observe the remarkable dealings of God's providence. While Haman's carpenters were hurrying forward their work against the morrow, the Lord caused sleep to depart from the king. He who commanded a hundred and twenty provinces, could not command an hour's sleep! This was ordered, that the king's attention should be drawn to the services of Mordecai, in an hour of repose and reflection.

During his sleepless hours, the monarch commanded that the book of records of his kingdom should be read, to pass away the time. The reader was directed to that part where the service of Mordecai was recorded; on inquiry, the king found that no reward had been given him. It was now day: Haman had entered the court of the palace ready to attend the king's first coming forth, purposing to ask that an order for the execution of Mordecai might be issued; not doubting that so trivial a request would be granted; for the life of an inferior then, as now, would at once be placed at the disposal of the favourite of an Eastern despot. But before Haman could present his request, the king asked him, "What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour?" This must be myself! thought the arrogant and cruel

favourite. He had already wealth and power; he, therefore, proposed that his vanity might be gratified by a vain outward show. He proposed that the man to be honoured should be clothed with royal apparel, seated upon the king's horse, and with the crown upon his head, escorted through the city by one of the most honourable of the princes. The presumption of Haman in this proposal is seen, when we consider that it was death to put on the king's turban or tiara, and that when a horse had once been mounted by the king, no subject ever presumed to ride him. The king adopted the suggestion; whether this proceeded from a sudden thought, what some may term the whim of the moment, or whether he was disgusted by the vanity of Haman, and designed to mortify him, he at once ordered the plan to be put into execution.

"Then the king said to Haman, Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the king's gate: let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken." Haman's consternation may be conceived; but the royal word was gone forth, nothing remained for him but to obey: ver. 11, "Then took Haman the apparel and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and brought him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaimed before him, Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour." The gravity of aspect generally to be remarked in the people of the East, might prevent much outward manifestation of surprize in the countenances of the poor Jew and the haughty vizier; but their inward feelings must have been deeply moved, and would not be of a common description.

Haman could not brook this disappointment. Instead of returning to the king's presence, he hastened home to tell what had befallen. His friends and wife saw in this event a presage of the failure of his plot against the Jews, and thought that his own doom was at hand. Might not this have been inferred with equal

certainty when he entered upon the undertaking? "Shall he prosper, shall he escape that doeth such things?" "Then said his wise men and Zeresh his wife unto him, If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him." How must this ominous warning, from lips accustomed to flatter, and only to utter phrases pleasing to their lord and master, have grated upon the ear of the proud Amalekite!

Before these painful anticipations had been fully considered, the chamberlain summoned Haman to the royal banquet. The gloomy state of his mind may easily be supposed. The king again asked Esther what was her petition. She then, at once, besought her life and the lives of her people, declaring that she would have been silent had they been doomed only to slavery. Another proof that they were not captives, their state in the land of their captivity had been improved. Being asked who could presume to act thus, Esther at once declared, "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman." These words, though proceeding from the lips of an anxious and distressed female, were powerful in their effect. The king, indignant at the treacherous plan thereby exposed, rose and departed; his so doing was, in effect, pronouncing a sentence of death. It was so with later Persian monarchs. Haman understood the awful state in which he stood, and interceded with Esther for his life. The king returned, when another expression of displeasure, then, as it now would do, signified a direct sentence of death. The attendants covered Haman's face, a fatal signal of death, and hurried him from the royal presence. Before the sun descended, Haman was hanged on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai; the latter was installed in the place of the proud Amalekite, and gifted with his possessions. Little had Haman thought for whom he heaped up his riches!

Esther was not unmindful of her people, though her

father's house might now be considered as beyond the malice of their enemies. She intreated that the fatal decree might be reversed; but it had gone forth, written in the king's name, and sealed with his seal; not

even the king himself could recal it. Full power, however, was given to Esther and Mordecai to write for the Jews: what could be done, was done; they were allowed to stand in their own defence. As this was by the royal authority, it was signified to the rulers of every province by special messengers on swift beasts, despatched by means of the establishment for that purpose, said to have been devised by Cyrus for expediting intelligence from all parts of his dominions. These post stations were in every part of the empire, at distances of twenty-five or thirty miles from each other, messengers and horses being always in readiness.

Many who would have sought the lives of the Jews and their spoil, would give up the attempt, especially as the news of Mordecai's advancement, with the rejoicing of the Jews, had such an effect, that a number

of the heathen professed themselves proselytes to the Jewish faith. This was because "the fear of the Jews fell upon them;" there is too much reason to think, that they did not profess themselves followers of Jehovah from conviction of their spiritual state, but from interested motives.

The high favour enjoyed by Mordecai is recorded, Esth. viii. 15, where it is stated that he went forth in purple and white, colours appropriated to the king, also with a crown or turban, encircled by a diadem, on his head.

On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the Jews assembled in their cities, to lay hands on such as sought their hurt. The royal officers helped them; their enemies were defeated and slain. Haman's sons were among those who fell. In remembrance of this deliverance, the feast of Purim was instituted, to be observed on the 14th and 15th of the month Adar. The name of this feast is derived from the Persian word, Pur, which signifies, "a lot;" Haman having "cast Pur," that is, the lot, to consume the Jews, and to destroy them. The deliverance is commemorated by the Jews at the present day. The feast is observed, the book of Esther is read in the synagogues, and loud execrations are uttered at the name of Haman.

The parentage of Esther was now fully known. The Jews had shown themselves a loyal people; they had not joined the Egyptians, or in any way disturbed the empire, but were favoured by the king, who raised Mordecai to be next in authority to himself, Esth. x. 3. It is added, "he was great among the Jews," (then the only professed worshippers of the true God,) "and accepted of the multitude of his brethren, seeking the wealth" (welfare) "of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed." It would be well if every minister of state sought that a similar record of his administration should be made.

The above account is a summary of the remarkable book which bears the name of the Persian queen of Hebrew parentage. The narrative is very instructive;

few, indeed, are called to act in spheres like those of Mordecai and Esther; but let every one endeavour, in like manner, to discharge the duties of their more lowly stations, and to live in the self-denial and self-devotion they displayed.

A building, at the site of the ancient Ecbatana, is

shown as the ancient tomb of Esther and Mordecai. But the present edifice was built long after that time, in place of a monument destroyed by Timour Beg. An inscription refers to that more ancient building, which, however, only goes back to about A.D. 250, as the period of the erection of that structure by two devout Jews. Two sarcophagi are preserved, as those of the queen and her uncle; they are of a dark hard wood, richly carved. The following translations of inscriptions in this tomb are from Porter.

On the sarcophagus of Esther. "I praise thee, O God, that thou hast created me. I know that my sins merit punishment, yet I hope for mercy at thy hands: for whenever I call upon thee thou art with me; thy

holy presence secures me from all evil. My heart is at ease, and my fear of thee increases. My life became at the last, through thy goodness, full of peace. O God, shut not my soul out from thy Divine presence. Those whom thou lovest never feel the torments of hell. Lead me, O merciful Father, to the life of life; that I may be filled with the heavenly fruits of paradise! Esther."

On the sarcophagus of Mordecai. "It is said by David, Preserve me, O God! I am now in thy presence. I have cried at the gate of heaven, that thou art my God; and what goodness I have I received from thee, O Lord!—Those whose bodies are now beneath in this earth, when animated by thy mercy were great; and whatever happiness was bestowed upon them in this world came from thee, O God! Their grief and sufferings were many, but they became happy because they always called upon thy holy name in their afflictions. Thou liftedst me up, and I became powerful. Thine enemies sought to destroy me in the early times of my life; but the shadow of thine hand was upon me, and covered me as a tent from their wicked purposes. Mordecai."

The Jew, as the royal steed he strode,
Through the thickening crowds in silence rode;
Grave was his mien, and calm his brow,
Undazzled, unmoved by the glittering show;
That stedfast soul which did not fear
The heathen's menace, the heathen's sneer;
Had known too long the favour and smile
Of the world, to be duped by its artful guile.
His heart in solemn prayer arose
To his only defence, when encompassed with foes;
To the Author of all that brightened his days,
The stay of his soul, and the theme of his praise;
His thoughts to captive Israel roam,
To the land of his birth, and his distant home;
And much he prayed that the Sun which gleamed
Tho' briefly and dimly, once more to have beamed
On the captive sons of Israel, might
Break forth and shine with its former light.

The Rebuilding of the Walls of Jerusalem.

CHAPTER XX.

NEHEMIAH OBTAINS LEAVE TO GO TO JERUSALEM, AND REBUILD THE WALLS — HIS REFORM — HE SILENCES THE ENEMIES OF THE JEWS.

THE time when the Persian monarchs were interested to favour the Jews, by restoring their state, was now come: here we see how God overrules the devices and projects of men, for the support and enlargement of his church. In the sixteenth year of his reign, B.C. 450, Artaxerxes, who having subdued the Egyptians, had engaged in warfare against their allies, the Athenians, was defeated. Cimon, the Athenian, gained victories over both the land and naval forces of his opponents. The Persian monarch was thereby compelled to make peace upon terms humbling and

disadvantageous to himself. He consented that the Greek colonies, or cities in Asia, should be free, and governed by their own laws; also, that no Persian governor should advance with an army nearer to the sea coast than three days' journey; and that no Persian ships of war should appear on the coasts of Asia Minor, or Syria. These stipulations rendered Palestine an important country, if in alliance with the Persians, or subject to that power. Greater favours and privileges, therefore, were granted to the Jews; who continued friendly to the Persians till their empire was overturned by Alexander.

Although this state of affairs may have rendered it a matter of policy for the Persian government to encourage the Jews; yet we find, from Scripture, the favourable decrees were obtained by the Divine blessing on the efforts of an individual.

Nehemiah, the son of Hachaliah, was the royal cupbearer, an office of great trust and honour; but although thus favourably placed, so far as his worldly affairs were concerned, he took a lively interest in the state of his fathers' land. Though he lived far away from Judea, at ease and in honour, he did not forget that he was an Israelite; he was anxious to promote the welfare of his people. Hanani, one of the brethren of Nehemiah, just returned from Jerusalem with other Jews, gave a doleful account of the state of affliction and reproach in which the Jews then were. Nehemiah was deeply affected; he prayed earnestly for his nation, resolving to exert himself in their behalf. It is well when we thus unite our best efforts to our best prayers. An opportunity soon offered. When presenting the cup to Artaxerxes, the king remarked an expression of sadness on his countenance, and immediately asked the cause. Nehemiah was "very sore afraid." He had reason to fear lest his feelings should be misunderstood by an arbitrary monarch, accustomed to act on the impulses of the moment. But in all cases of doubt and difficulty,

the only safe course is that of truth; he told the real cause—the desolate state of Jerusalem. The king asked what was his request; he was emboldened to speak, but dared not to open his lips till he had sought Divine assistance. If ever there was a case apparently precluding from prayer, this was one; but though standing in the royal presence, in the act of presenting the cup, and called upon for an immediate answer, Nehemiah first "prayed to the God of heaven;" he did so, feeling the urgent necessity for Divine assistance. He could only offer a sudden and secret petition; but this was prayer;

> Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,
> Utter'd, or unexpress'd.

It was heard and answered. Nehemiah petitioned the king that he might be sent to Jerusalem to rebuild it: thus he showed readiness to forego the worldly advantages of his station at court, to forward the work of the Lord and the welfare of his people. The Lord inclined the king's heart; the petition of Nehemiah was granted, supported as it appears by the queen, perhaps Esther; greater authority was granted to him, as chief ruler of his people, than to any who had preceded him. Orders were given for all the supplies necessary in the work; a military guard was sent with the new governor. Thus his journey was under circumstances very different from those of Zerubbabel and Ezra.

The Samaritans, and other enemies of the Jews, soon heard that one was come from the court, empowered to seek the welfare of the children of Israel; they determined to make all the opposition in their power. Nehemiah felt the importance of acting with much caution. His first object was to secure the city by repairing the walls: his survey of their ruined state was made secretly by night; the light of the moon would enable him sufficiently to discern the objects around him. He saw the unprotected state of

Jerusalem, and strongly urged the rulers, priests, and nobles, to go forward with this work; disclosing to them the full powers he possessed, and the manner in which God had given him favour in the sight of the king.

The work was begun; it went forward simultaneously in many parts of the circuit of the city at once. The different leaders and families repaired separate parts of the wall; some appear to have repaired considerable portions. Several repaired parts opposite to their own houses; one only the piece over against his chamber, but thereby the work went forward. In all matters of public interest, if every one would but undertake that which is in his own power, all that is needful would be done. Some, who were the most influential and the best able to forward the work, neglected or refused to help; a contrast to other cases in which even females rendered assistance: and of Baruch, the son of Zabbai, it is said, that he "earnestly" repaired the piece he undertook. How truly does this represent the progress of every good work in our own day! Some are cold and indifferent; but when the Lord gives his blessing, enough will be found to accomplish his will, and sad is the case of those who neglect or refuse to perform their duty.

Sanballat and his confederates at first mocked, saying that if a fox, meaning one of the jackals or wild dogs which abound in Judea, went up, it would break down this stone wall! They proceeded to threatenings; they then conspired to hinder the work by force. This only called forth more energy on the part of Nehemiah: the people were dispersed on the wall; he caused them to be armed, and held a sufficient number in reserve to render assistance wherever an attack might be made. How true a picture of Christian warfare! every follower of Christ is both a labourer and a soldier; if not at work, still he must be upon his watch. Satan fears to attack the Christian who is upon his guard.

The great work of rebuilding the wall was completed in fifty and two days, at least so far as to afford security to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Nehemiah was severely tried, both by his own people and the enemy, who were, against their will, compelled to mark well these bulwarks, Psa. xlviii. 13. While urging forward the work, his attention was called to the oppressive conduct of many among the richer Jews towards their poorer brethren; who, instead of having regard to the general welfare, and thereby best promoting their own prosperity, with that grasping selfishness which we see every day exemplified around us, took the opportunity of exacting an exorbitant rate of interest from their poorer brethren, for money advanced to enable them to pay the royal tribute, and to support their families till the harvest was gathered in, although they themselves were engaged in raising walls to protect Jerusalem. This was pushed so far, that many were deprived of their houses and small portions of land, while their children were taken for bond servants: thus the community was weakened, and the usurers, with their ill-gotten gains, exposed themselves to the enemy. One who acts thus, can only be compared to a man sawing off a bough on which he is sitting, careless as to his own downfal. He, in fact, relies upon others to hold him up; while he weakens those around him, and renders them unwilling to protect him. Such are the men described in the 73rd Psalm, "They are not in trouble as other men; therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain, and violence covereth them as a garment." The Psalmist was unable to understand why this should be permitted; but when he went into the sanctuary of God, when he considered the infinite wisdom and perfect holiness of God, who doeth all things well, then he understood their end, and learned to trust in the Lord God: ver. 18—20:

Surely thou didst set them in slippery places:
Thou castedst them down into destruction.
How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment!

They are utterly consumed with terrors.
As a dream when one awaketh;
So, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.

Alas, that there should be such in every age and nation; but this is human nature: every day we see men "greedy of gain," though such riches are only kept to the hurt of the owners thereof, and shall cause them "to weep and howl for the miseries that shall come upon them." The parable, or narrative of the rich man and Lazarus, Luke xvi., and the admonition of the apostle, see James v., conveys instruction to men of every generation.

Nehemiah's prompt interference stopped this evil; but he taught by example still more than by precept. During the twelve years he exercised the office of tirshatha, or governor, he set a noble example of forbearance, and disregard of his private interest, not requiring even the supplies to which he was entitled by his office. This was making a good use of the wealth with which God blessed him. Had he not been thus circumstanced, such forbearance would hardly have been right: for the workman is worthy of his hire; and whoever is placed in a station of authority and influence, has much more labour to perform, and many duties to discharge, more difficult and exhausting, both to body and mind, than the labourer who works for his daily bread. The earnestness with which Nehemiah besought the offenders, on this occasion, shows the deep view he took of the evil conduct he spoke against. The shaking his lap, or the skirt of his garment, was a ceremony, then and still used in the East, to convey the idea of deep interest in any matter under consideration.

Sanballat, with his confederates, thought to do Nehemiah a mischief; but their proceedings were not ably arranged, nor adapted to the end they designed to secure. They sent to invite him to meet them at some distance from Jerusalem. This attendance was not

required of him, either by the call of duty or of inclination. Four times did they send these messages; so anxious were they to get him, if possible, into their power. Nehemiah's answer was to the purpose: "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?" This Scripture narrative is given for our instruction: doubtless the perseverance of Nehemiah is recorded, to show the Christian how he must continue earnest in the work of his God, especially in that which concerns his own soul, and how he must stedfastly resist all attempts to entice him from his work, or to deter him from stedfastly pursuing it. In all such cases the answer of Nehemiah is appropriate, and should ever be borne in mind.

Finding Nehemiah on his guard, the enemies added insult, sending a scoffing letter open in the hand of the messenger, instead of carefully sealed in a bag, as usual in the East; where letters, especially to persons in office, are sent with much ceremony, the omission of which shows studied contempt. These open enemies were supported by pretended friends, who increased the difficulty of Nehemiah's position. It is narder to guard against a pretended friend than an open enemy; especially does the believer find it trying to discover that those in whom he trusted, whom he thought to be followers of the same Lord, are opposed to him, and to the work of his Divine Master. The Psalmist felt it a deep aggravation of his sorrow, when his friend, his familiar friend, one with whom he had walked to the house of God, joined against him. The believer is taught to look for disappointment and opposition from the world, but he does not expect it from those who profess to be followers of the Saviour. Nehemiah had to experience this trial: a false prophet and prophetess confederated with his enemies, they sought to induce him to shut himself up in the temple for safety; thus to leave his work, and discourage those who were engaged in executing his orders.

Nehemiah silenced these deceivers by an emphatic declaration, ch. vi. 11; "And I said, Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in." He saw the danger of being betrayed to inconsistent conduct, and bravely stood his ground. Let every professed Christian do the same. When tempted to sin, let the thought be, "Shall I, a professed child of God, give way to the world, the flesh, and the devil? Shall I do that which would disgrace my profession, and bring down condemnation upon myself and others?" Still the correspondence with the enemy continued; more letters were sent to put Nehemiah in fear, but the enemies were cast down, "for they perceived that the work was wrought of God." The nobles of Judah, those who ought especially to have supported Nehemiah, were opposed to him; they maintained a constant correspondence with Tobiah, and evidently assisted that heathen stranger, in preference to their own ruler, by whom God had wrought wondrous things for them. "They reported his good deeds before me," says Nehemiah. The "good deeds of Tobiah!" of him who grieved exceedingly that one was come to seek the welfare of the children of Israel; and who sought, by every means in his power, to hinder the work of God! Yes, such is the effect of party spirit: preference is given, by many professed followers of Christ, to the deeds of worldly men, over those of the sincere believer, even in our own day! How often do we hear "the good deeds of a Tobiah" highly applauded; while the earnest zeal and unsparing exertions of a Nehemiah are censured, or at best, condemned by the faint praises with which they are noticed! But there is One who seeth not as man seeth; with Him the believer may leave his cause: Nehemiah did so.

When the wall was completed, it was solemnly dedicated to the Lord. This seems to have been in pursuance of the direction in the law given by Moses,

to acknowledge the Lord's favour and mercy on the completion of any new building. Nehemiah was well aware of the declaration in Psa. cxxvii. 1:

> Except the Lord build the house,
> They labour in vain that build it:
> Except the Lord keep the city,
> The watchman waketh but in vain.

The manner of the ceremonial of dedication is described in Nehemiah xii. 27—43. The people were assembled, and moved along the wall in solemn procession, with instruments of music, also uttering vocal praises, rejoicing loudly so "that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off." Arrangements were then made for the appointment of officers, and the due discharge of the services of the temple.

Having thus happily brought to a conclusion this very important work, Nehemiah appointed his brother Hanani, jointly with Hananiah, the ruler of the palace, to have charge over Jerusalem, and to cause the gates to be carefully watched. Observe the qualification for this office, "He was a faithful man, and feared God above many." Nehemiah then returned to the Persian court; but in a few months came back again to Jerusalem. Prideaux considers that Nehemiah's first return to the Persian court was in conformity to his promise to the king, and that he might give a correct report, both of what he had done in building the wall, and of what remained to be done in other matters; whereby he prevailed upon the Persian monarch to spare him, that he might continue ruler of the province, and promote the welfare of his people; and he continued to govern them for the next twelve years.

Ezra reading the Law.

CHAPTER XXI.

NEHEMIAH'S CARE FOR THE PROSPERITY OF JERUSALEM—THE PUBLIC READING OF THE LAW—A PUBLIC FAST AND HUMILIATION.

On Nehemiah's return to Jerusalem, which was in the same or the following year, he set himself with much energy to carry into effect various matters which were important for the settlement of the Jewish state. Among these, one of the first was the bringing a larger number of inhabitants to reside in Jerusalem. He prevailed upon some of the higher ranks to build houses there; others were induced by their example to do the same: a further portion, a tenth of the people, residing hitherto in the country, allowed themselves

to be selected by lot to settle in the city. It was now fortified with walls and gates, making it a secure place of residence, which caused the people to be more willing to dwell there: thus Jerusalem again became a place of importance. It is spoken of as such by Herodotus, the earliest Greek historian, who visited it about the time under consideration; he describes it as nearly the size of Sardis, then the chief city of Lesser Asia; but it was far, very far below the Jerusalem of Solomon, for wealth and importance among the surrounding lands. The products of the East, and the riches of the West, were no longer brought to Judea as a central mart of the nations. No longer could it be said,

> For thee his ivory load Behemoth bore,
> And far Sofala teemed with golden ore;
> Thine all the arts that wait on wealth's increase,
> Or bask and wanton in the beam of peace.

The caravans passed beyond their borders; the Jews were as yet a people seeming to be struggling for their existence. They were dependent upon the Persian government for the timber needful for their sacred buildings. How different from the time when silver was in Jerusalem as stones, and cedars as the sycamore trees that were in the vale, for abundance! 1 Kings x. 27.

Another important subject that engaged the attention of Nehemiah, was the examining and clearing up the genealogies of the people. By this measure, civil rights as to possessions were more correctly ascertained; also, several matters relative to the Levites, and the service of the sanctuary, were thereby settled. The inquiry was regulated by the genealogy or list of those who first returned with Zerubbabel, corrected according to some alterations which had taken place in the interim. This accounts for the similarity between the genealogies in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, with some differences which may be observed

in them; the apparent discrepancies have been carefully examined and explained by commentators.

Ezra was long engaged in the great work of collecting the Holy Scriptures, already described. The books of the law being now completed in the Chaldean character, were read to the people at the feast of trumpets, which took place on the first day of the seventh month, or Tisri, the beginning of the civil or common year, as the month Nisan, in which the children of Israel were delivered from Egypt, was the beginning of their ecclesiastical year. The particulars relative to these festivals will be found in "*The Rites and Worship of the Jews.*" The people having assembled from all parts of the land, called upon Ezra, that the law should be publicly read on this occasion. The circumstances are related Nehemiah viii.

A wooden scaffold, or pulpit, being erected in the widest street of the city, Ezra stood thereon, with thirteen elders, and the congregation, both men and women, all that could hear with understanding, were assembled before him. He was engaged several hours in reading the Hebrew text, while the elders, who were instructed for the purpose, repeated it sentence by sentence in Chaldee, the language or dialect understood by the people, "So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading." How important this brief remark! how fully it shows that the reading of the word of God should ever be accompanied by care to make it known to the people! Several hours having been thus occupied, the people were dismissed to partake of the feast they had prepared, with an exhortation, to be mindful of those who were destitute, verses 9, 10;

And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law. Then he

said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength.

A counsel which should be attended to at all times, not only in the literal sense, but in the spiritual one, for all who enjoy the sacred rites, the blessings of Divine ordinances, should send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared.

The next morning the people assembled again; the word was in like manner read to them. In Leviticus they found the directions concerning the feast of tabernacles, which excited an earnest desire to keep it at the time appointed, on the fifteenth day of the same month. Proclamation was accordingly made throughout the land, the booths were erected upon the flat roofs of the houses, and in the streets, of branches of olives, pines, myrtles, and other thick trees. The festival was kept with more solemnity and rejoicings than had been observed from the days of Joshua.

Go forth to the mount—bring the olive branch home,
And rejoice, for the day of our freedom is come!
From that time, when the moon upon Ajalon's vale,
  Looking motionless down, saw the kings of the earth,
In the presence of God's mighty champion grow pale—
  Oh never had Judah an hour of such mirth!
Go forth to the mount—bring the olive branch home,
And rejoice, for the day of our freedom is come!

Bring myrtle and palm—bring the boughs of each tree,
That is worthy to wave o'er the tents of the free.
From that day, when the footsteps of Israel shone,
  With a light not their own, through the Jordan's deep tide,
Whose waters shrunk back as the ark glided on,
  Oh never had Judah an hour of such pride!
Go forth to the mount—bring the olive branch home,
And rejoice, for the day of our freedom is come.

Ezra improved the opportunity by causing portions of the law to be read on each day. By this they

people perceived in how many things they had transgressed the Divine word; a fast was therefore appointed, to follow the conclusion of the festival.

This solemn day of humiliation was observed on the twenty-fourth of the same month, at the appointment of Ezra and Nehemiah, when the congregation assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with earth upon their heads. They separated themselves from strangers, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. A public confession was made by the Levites in the name of the people, and in their hearing, and a solemn vow and covenant then was made, that these sins should be avoided in future, and God's laws observed. A number of the rulers, priests, and Levites, signed and sealed this covenant, while the people at large solemnly made oath to observe it. The principal conditions were—not to intermarry with the Gentiles; to observe the sabbaths and the sabbatical year; to provide for the service and work of the house of God, with the offerings, and the first fruits and tithes, for the support of the Levites. In this solemn engagement, reference evidently was made to those blessings which were typified by the sacrifices and offerings.

Ignorance of the Divine law had led to much evil; arrangements, therefore, were from this time made for the regular reading and expounding of portions of the law and the prophets, in the public assemblies for religious worship. The institution of the synagogues has already been mentioned; it is supposed to have taken place about this period. Let it never be forgotten, that upon the due observance of public worship very much of the religious feeling of a community depends. "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." This was the injunction by the apostle; and we well know that our blessed Lord, while upon earth, was constant in public religious services. Prideaux speaks in strong terms of the importance of regular weekly

public instruction in the truths of religion. He says, "It is not to be doubted but if this method were once dropped among us, the generality of the people, whatever else was done to obviate it, would in seven years relapse into as bad a state of barbarity, as was ever in practice among the worst of our Saxon and Danish ancestors." The synagogue services were not confined to once in a week: it is much to be lamented that the weekly services, lectures, and assembling for reading the word and prayer, are so scantily attended among us. This is one evil result of the excessive eagerness and increased exertion in matters of business at the present day; but it should be remembered, that although Martha was not blamed for active attention to her worldly duties, yet she carried this too far, and Mary's preference for the one thing needful was commended.

Nehemiah gave assistance to the great work of collecting the Holy Scriptures. He evidently aided, as far as was in his power, to make the Bible accessible to the people. In the second book of the Maccabees, it is stated, that "he, founding a library, gathered together the acts of the kings, and the prophets, and of David, and the epistles of the kings concerning the holy gifts." The latter probably refers to the decrees of the Persian kings, contained in Ezra and Nehemiah. This account also notices the writings and commentaries of Nehemiah.

The attention of Ezra, in collecting the books of Scripture, with the arrangements made by himself and Nehemiah and others, that the people should be acquainted with their contents, under the Divine blessing, was one great means of preventing the Jews from relapsing into idolatry. Although their sufferings in captivity were so far forgotten, that they fell into many and grievous errors, it was not by idolatry, against which they were so plainly and constantly warned by the Holy Scriptures. Satan's most effectual plan to deceive the Jews, from this time, appears

to have been, by inducing them to have an overweening opinion of the Divine preference for their nation, in appointing them the depositaries of his word, and to add vain traditions; in fact, making the word of God of none effect through their traditions, though they professed to venerate every jot and tittle of the Bible. Let this warn us to beware how we listen to those who teach for doctrines the commandments of men, and thus add to the Bible that which is not expressly set forth therein, as of equal or even greater authority than the full and plain precepts of Scripture. Even the pagan emperor, Julian the apostate, was so fully convinced of the importance of a people being thoroughly acquainted with the writings they receive as sacred, that he ordered his heathen philosophers to prepare a course of instruction from the best works of heathenism, that it might be taught instead of the Bible! His effort failed; he was cut off by a Divine judgment, as he expressly acknowledged, before his plan was brought into use; but let the Christian hence learn to value his Bible, and to seek to make others acquainted with its contents.

There is not any farther account of Ezra recorded in Scripture. Josephus states that he died at Jerusalem; but the general tradition of the Jews is, that he died at Zamsuma on the Tigris, when on his way to Susa, to communicate to Artaxerxes on the affairs of the Jews. A building surrounded by walls, stated to be his tomb, is shown near the river Tigris, about twenty miles above its junction with the Euphrates. It was rebuilt by the Mohammedans about a century ago, on the site of a more extensive building, visited and described by Benjamin of Tudela in the twelfth century. A tribe of Arabs guard this tomb; they levy contributions from the pilgrims who visit it; these are numerous, chiefly Jews.

A Refiner of Silver, from an ancient Egyptian Sculpture.

CHAPTER XXII.

NEHEMIAH'S FURTHER EFFORTS FOR GOOD—MALACHI, THE LAST OF THE PROPHETS.

NEHEMIAH remained twelve years at Jerusalem, governing the city; during the whole of this time he lived in a very hospitable manner, daily receiving at his table a hundred and fifty of the principal Jews, besides strangers. The expense of this establishment he bore from his private funds, without taking the allowance due to him from his office, which he might fairly and lawfully have received. He mentions this as a testimony that he desired the welfare of the people, not as a ground of self-confidence or merit, but with earnest prayer that he might be remembered for good. The apostle Paul, like Nehemiah, found it needful to silence gainsayers, by stating his own upright conduct, and the motives from which he acted. This may still be necessary at times; but the believer

considers such things as the fruits of Divine grace, and only as evidences of justifying faith, not as the ground of his justification.

Having thus set a good example, Nehemiah had reason to expect that those whom he left in authority would show themselves equally disinterested, and free from self-seeking, or covetousness, or desire to promote the interests of their immediate connexions at the expense of the public welfare, or by injuring the cause of God. About B.C. 432, Nehemiah returned to the court of Persia. How long he remained there is uncertain, nor are we informed respecting his engagements there. Prideaux supposes he remained at least five years away from Judea. Hales calculates he was eight years absent. It was an interval long enough for the revival of many corruptions.

On his return to Jerusalem, he found much evil prevailing, from marriages with the neighbouring people. Eliashib the high priest had allowed Tobiah the Ammonite to have an apartment appropriated for his use, even in the temple. It was a large chamber, the proper use of which was to store the offerings and portions of the Levites and priests. Nehemiah caused the furniture and goods of Tobiah to be cast out, and restored the chamber to the purposes for which it was designed. He found, also, that the Levites had been deprived of their portions; so that they were compelled to leave the services of the temple to cultivate their lands themselves, for their maintenance. Nehemiah appointed faithful men to see to the due distribution of the Levites' portions among them.

Another serious evil was, that in the neglect of the Divine command, and of their own solemn covenant, some of the Jews followed their customary labours on the sabbath, while others purchased on that day fish and other articles brought by the men of Tyre for sale. The former of these evils Nehemiah stopped, by reminding the nobles of Judah, that sabbath breaking was one of the crying sins which brought down judgments on their fathers. The latter was put an

end to by keeping the gates of the city closed, not allowing any burden to be brought in on the sabbath. Much strictness in opening and shutting the gates was always customary, and is still observed in the Eastern cities. The dealers, finding themselves compelled to lodge without the walls, soon ceased from attempting to trade on the sacred day. Sabbath trading is a serious evil; thereby the holy rest is desecrated, the thoughts are led from spiritual and eternal things, an inlet is made for numerous evils, even the bodily health suffers. How many who have been cut off in their sins, have attributed the first beginning of their evil courses to the neglect and profanation of the sabbath!

The irreligious and profane state into which the Jews had fallen, is plainly declared by Malachi, the last of the prophets, who was inspired about B.C. 420. He rebuked the priests as well as the people; the former encouraged the latter in bringing worthless sacrifices for burnt offerings. Contrary to the express directions of the law, they brought diseased cattle, such as they dared not present to an earthly ruler. The prophet then speaks of a pure offering, which in future times should be offered throughout the world; which many conclude refers to the Lord's supper. Malachi denounces a solemn curse against the priests, for not rightly instructing the people in the Divine law, and for regarding the rich with more favour than the poor. Mal. ii. 4—9:

And ye shall know
That I have sent this commandment unto you,
That my covenant might be with Levi, saith the Lord of hosts.
My covenant was with him of life and peace;
And I gave them to him
For the fear wherewith he feared me,
And was afraid before my name.
The law of truth was in his mouth,
And iniquity was not found in his lips:
He walked with me in peace and equity,
And did turn many away from iniquity.

For the priest's lips should keep knowledge,
And they should seek the law at his mouth:
For he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.
But ye are departed out of the way;
Ye have caused many to stumble at the law;
Ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the Lord of hosts.
Therefore have I also made you contemptible
And base before all the people,
According as ye have not kept my ways,
But have been partial in the law.

The marrying daughters of idolaters is condemned; also, the putting away of lawful wives: their folly and sinful conduct in supposing that God would not regard this wickedness is shown. Here is a remarkable passage, which may be rendered as follows, so as to be rather clearer than it is in our version:

Yet ye say wherefore?—
Because Jehovah has been a witness
Between thee and the wife of thy youth,
Against whom then hast thou dealt treacherously:
Yet is she thy companion and covenanted wife.
And did He make only one woman,
Though he had the residue of the Spirit?
And wherefore made he only one?
That he might seek a godly seed.
Therefore take heed to thy spirit,
And let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth.—*Boothroyd.*

The Almighty determined there should be one wife for one husband, Gen. ii. 24; Matt. xix. 2—5. This is best suited for the welfare, both temporal and spiritual, of parents and children; what guilt then do they incur who sin against this plain decree and institution of the Most High! This evil especially engaged the attention of Nehemiah, who heard the children speaking a mongrel and mixed speech, that of Ashdod, Ammon, or Moab, confused with the Jews' language. Even a grandson of the high priest had married a daughter of Sanballat the Horonite. Nehemiah rebuked the offenders severely, causing them to put away their strange wives. Josephus relates, that

Manasseh, the grandson of the high priest, on this withdrew to Samaria, and settled there, chief priest of the temple built on Mount Gerizim by Sanballat.

Nehemiah briefly recounts these his efforts for reformation, and concludes, "Remember me, O my God, for good." If, like him, we are faithful in the work of our Lord and Master, according to our respective stations, we may, like him, pray that the Lord would remember us and our services, though at best defective and defiled. After the life of the most unwearied services, and the most extended usefulness, still there is abundant cause to abhor ourselves, and to seek forgiveness. If we venture, with Nehemiah, to say, "Remember me, O my God, concerning this also;" let us earnestly add, "and spare me according to the multitude of thy mercy." The more closely we examine our best deeds, the more cause will every one find to say,

> My best is stained and dyed with sin;
> The whole is nothing worth.

There is no farther account of Nehemiah in Scripture. Josephus relates, that he lived to an advanced age, when, after having performed many excellent actions, he died much honoured and lamented. He stands conspicuous among the excellent characters recorded in Scripture history, and has left a valuable, instructive example to all who are called to discharge the duties of any public station.

The last prophecy in the Old Testament is a very remarkable one. Malachi speaks expressly therein of the coming of Christ; pointing out John the Baptist, his forerunner, under the title of Elijah. After noticing how the Jews wearied the Lord with their words or empty professions, he proceeds, Mal. iii. 1—4,

> Behold, I will send my messenger,
> And he shall prepare the way before me:
> And the Lord, whom ye seek,
> Shall suddenly come to his temple,

Even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in:
Behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.
But who may abide the day of his coming?
And who shall stand when he appeareth?
For he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap:
And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver:
And he shall purify the sons of Levi,
And purge them as gold and silver,
That they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.
Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem
Be pleasant unto the Lord,
As in the days of old,
And as in former years.

To this is added the gracious declaration, verse 6,

For I am the Lord, I change not;
Therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

Among the ancient Egyptian sculptures the refiner of precious metals is represented, so as to show the care and patient waiting with which he looked and waited for the right moment to remove the crucible from the furnace. See cut, page 186.

After again reminding the Jews of the manner in which they had slighted the offerings they were to bring to the Lord, a solemn and remarkable declaration is added, verses 16—18; the latter part declares,

A book of remembrance was written before him
For them that feared the Lord,
And that thought upon his name.
And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts,
In that day when I make up my jewels;
And I will spare them, as a man spareth
His own son that serveth him.
Then shall ye return, and discern
Between the righteous and the wicked,
Between him that serveth God
And him that serveth him not.

Then, in conclusion, is a reference to the awful destruction of Jerusalem, but in terms which are also applicable to the day of judgment: the words of

threatening and the gracious promises are as appropriate to the Christian as to the Jew; ch. iv. 1—3:

For, behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven:
And all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble:
And the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts,
That it shall leave them neither root nor branch.
But unto you that fear my name
Shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings;
And ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.
And ye shall tread down the wicked;
For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet
In the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of hosts.

Then John the Baptist is spoken of, who should come in the spirit and power of Elias, the forerunner of the long looked-for "He that should come:" and, by awakening arguments, all are exhorted to hear, obey, and look for the great Messiah, ver. 5, 6:

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet
Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord:
And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children,
And the heart of the children to their fathers,
Lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

Thus the Old Testament closes with the solemn announcement of that prophet, the forerunner of One greater than himself, with whom the narrative of the New Testament begins; that blessed book which declares the history and words of Him, the testimony of whom is the spirit of prophecy, Rev. xix. 10.

We mourn not that prophetic skill
Is found on earth no more;
Enough for us to trace Thy will
In Scripture's sacred lore.

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